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ITALY,

PAST AND PRESENT,

BY L. MARIOTTI.

TRANSLATED BY H. M. MARIOTTI.

VOL. I.

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1880.



ITALY,
PAST AND PRESENT.

BY L. MARIOTTI,

PROF. OF ITALIAN LITERATURE IN THE LONDON UNIVERSITY.

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VOL. I.  
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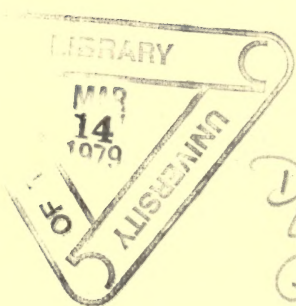
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ITALY

PAST AND PRESENT

BY E. W. LUTHER

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS



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INTRODUCTION.

Down in a southern clime, amidst the silent waves of a tideless sea, there lies a weary land, whose life is only in the Past and the Future. It is the purpose of this work to interrogate the monuments of her Past—to throw some light on the mystery of her Future.

The interest Italy and her institutions, her history and literature, awaken in the heart of foreign readers, is too apt to be of a posthumous character. It is only the wreck of Italian genius they love to contemplate, as it is only the havoc of departed greatness the traveller stops to muse on, amidst the magnificent desolation of Rome.

An Italian abroad is soon brought to admit and act upon this general conviction of the social and moral extinction of his fatherland. He who looked upon it with the veneration of a son and the enthusiasm of a lover, who meditated on its ruins and shrines, and mingled with the crowd of its cities, who had studied Italy even to become proud of her memories, and live on her hopes—must needs outgrow his earliest predilections. The land becomes to him, also, a vast cemetery, exhibiting nothing but “bare skulls and cross-bones,” where men come with awe and wonder, to tread on “the dust of nations.”

But, lo! of a sudden the ideas of mankind take an opposite turn. Every day brings us glad tidings about Italy.

The Italians, it is thought, are to have liberty for the mere asking. They will receive it as a boon from their princes. The "old chimera of a pope" is rejuvenised. Pius IX. conspires from the throne; he is at the head of Young Italy, plotting a harmless, bloodless revolution, even such as this peaceful generation admires.

The Italians are wild with excitement; agape with breathless expectation. The tongue-strings of the nation are broken loose. Public opinion is loud, fearless, unbounded. The Italians are to have a country. In the meanwhile, they have a national song!

The eyes of Europe are once more upon them. The sister-nations are aware of their existence. Inveterate utilitarians, leaders of Anti-Corn-Law Leagues come back from their continental tour, eloquent on the subject of "Italy and the Italians!"

An Italian abroad hardly dares to abandon himself to his joy. Long-deferred expectation has taught him despondency. He is slow to hope, as he was loth to despair. His faith in popes and princes is of too recent a date. The regeneration of Italy was, in his estimation, to be a painful, laborious task. The first faint streak of daylight is hardly dawning on the country. It is the harbinger of a long day of toil and struggle. The course of events is in the hands of God alone. The redemption of Italy demands no less than the active and immediate interference of His providence.

The present Essay aimed originally to protest against the sentence of those cold reasoners, who, by disheartening theories, anticipating the decrees of Heaven, had pronounced—"It is over for ever with Italy!" It is, now, equally intended as a warning to those sanguine enthusiasts, who, elated by the first sudden gleam of sunshine, are ready to exclaim, "Italy is safe!" To a man who accurately studies the mutual dependences of cause and effect, nothing comes unforeseen. The phenomenon of a

liberal pope is no more than one of the ordinary phases of Italian life. Pius IX., the Italians may say, is a pope of our own making. It is the manifestation of that OPINION, which has long been at work ; which men too long disavowed or disregarded.

Meanwhile, it is well that Italy has once more become a popular theme. It had been but too long the haunt of idle strangers, who judged in haste and prejudice, who studied things not men ; and who dealt too rashly against a country which could not even enjoy the privilege of openly pleading its cause.

Let an Italian stand up for his home and his household gods ! The land of his birth has been the object of his studies through life. Years and adversity, the dreariness of exile have—ought, at least, to have—sobered his judgment and qualified his partiality. His patriotic zeal has been put to the test of sorrow and humiliation. He has learnt to love truth even better than his country ; or, rather, he has been brought to acknowledge the identity of truth with honest patriotism ; with every noble, every sacred cause, that may warm a man's breast.

Italy, in modern civilisation the eldest of countries, exhibits in her outward aspect the long ravages of age. Ruins of forums and mausoleums, arches of bridges and aqueducts, Gothic castles and temples, nunneries, dungeons, Madonnas and Venuses, the wrecks of all worships and governments, all crushed in a common heap, mouldering in a general dissolution. Such is old Italy. But among those ruins a few warm, confiding hearts were seen, impatient of that lingering decay, actively though rather indiscriminately hastening the work of time, trampling those remains with disdain, to level them to the ground, a basis for new edifices ; young believers, firm in the opinion of an approaching redemption, sanguine thinkers exulting in the eternal reproduction of all things. Such was Young Italy, the element of Italy as it rose from the dead.

It could not have been difficult for a candid observer to recognise in that country an age of transition. Such is, in fact, the condition of all Europe ; but in other countries it is a question of democracy or aristocracy, of reforms and constitutions ; in Italy it is a question of existence. The revolution of Italy must be a total subversion of all social orders ; it is not to be effected by sects or conspiracies, not by fortuitous incidents of wars, or changes of dynasties ; it must arise from the recasting of the individual and national character, from the enlightened resentment of masses, from the sympathy of an immense compact population, from the resources of a rich soil, from the seeds sown by a liberal, refined civilisation, developed in several unsuccessful attempts, and strengthened by insane persecutions.

Few countries have, in the course of the last fifty years—we mean the age of Napoleon—undergone a more total revolution than Italy. Her political divisions and boundaries are indeed nearly the same, with the exception, perhaps, of Venice and Genoa, the last leaves hanging on a withered branch, which were doomed to drop at the first blast of November ; but all the notions, the morals, the passions, the prejudices and superstitions, the popular festivals and spectacles have either been entirely abolished, or changed in their nature and tendency, or are gradually losing their interest.

From the days of Charles V. to the end of the last century, Italy had undergone a rapid, yet imperceptible decline : her sky smiled as brightly as ever, her climate was as mild. A privileged land, removed from all cares of political existence, she went on with dances and music, happy in her ignorance, sleeping in the intoxication of incessant prosperity. Used to the scourges of invasion, passive in all rivalries springing up among her neighbours, schooled to suffer and to forget, she consoled herself for the evils inflicted by foreigners, with the old saying, that her land was destined to be the tomb of her conquerors.

The first spring shower washed away the blood with which the invaders had stained the green enamel of her plains ; the first harvest, luxuriant from a soil enriched by French and German corpses, made up for the dearth occasioned by the waste of a hungry soldiery ; and the sons of the south took up again their guitars, wiped away their tears, and sang anew, like a flock of birds when the tempest is over.

Such were not the consequences of the late wars ; her neighbours were envious of that uninterrupted enjoyment ; the serpent intruded himself into the Eden of Europe. The French philosophers persuaded the Italians they were too happy, and they envied the tempests of France, as if tired of happiness.

The French, wanting aid from every quarter, hailed the awakening of Italy. They gave her a standard ; they girt her sons with the weapons of war ; they seated them in senates and parliaments. They dusted the iron crown of the Lombards, and placed it on the brow of one of her islanders. The Italians started up ; they believed, they followed, they fought. Deceived by the French, they turned to the Austrians—betrayed by the Austrians, they came back to the French. There ensued a series of deception and perfidy, of blind confidence and disappointment ; and when the Italians, weary, dejected, and ravaged, lay down abandoned to their bitter reflections, an awful truth shone in its full evidence—the only price for torrents of blood—that beyond the Alps they had nothing but enemies. The reaction was long and severe. To those few years of raving intoxication, lethargy succeeded, and nothingness. The sword was taken from the side of the brave, the lips of the wise were closed ; all was settled, and silenced, and fettered, but thought.

Thought remained anxious, sleepless, rebellious ; with a grim, severe monitor behind—Memory ; and a rosy syren before—Hope, always within its reach, always receding

from its embrace ; and it sat a tyrant of the soul, preyed upon the heart of the young, of the brave, of the lovely, choosing its victims with the cruel sagacity of the vampire, and it strewed their couches with thorns, and sprinkled their feasts with poison, and snatched from their hands the cup of pleasure.

“ Italians,”—was the cry, “ remember what you have been, what you are, what you must be. Is it thus, on the dust of heroes, is it in the fairest of lands, that you drag on days of abjectness ? Will you never afford a better spectacle to the nations than masquerades and processions of monks ? Will you never go out among strangers, except as fiddlers and limners ? England and France are subduing deserts and oceans ; Germany flourishes in science and letters. The sons of the north are snatching from your hands the sceptre of the arts. What is to become of Italy ? Shall her name be buried under these ruins, to which you cling with the fondness of a fallen noble, prouder of the escutcheon, and of the portraits of his ancestors, in proportion as he degenerates from them ? Shall it be said of her sons that they have made their own destiny, and they groan under a yoke they have merited ? ”

Such were the bitter chagrins to which the Italians had been left from the ephemeral excitement arising from the revolutionary ideas of the late convulsions of Europe. The nation at large had assumed a serious and sullen countenance. The revels of the carnivals began to lose their attractions ; that slow and silent disease, that atrabilarious frenzy—politics, pervaded all ranks, exhibiting a striking contrast with the radiant and harmonious gaiety of heaven and earth. Morals gained by this melancholy mood, and studies came off conquerors over all obstacles raised against them.

Unfortunately the rulers were not, for a long time, capable of justly appreciating the new ideas and wants of the age. Instead of encouraging these awakening energies

and directing them to noble pursuits, they were alarmed at the prevailing restlessness of mind; they apprehended in it the germs of social dissolution. They declared war to the movement, but the movement dragged and involved them in spite of themselves. They shed blood lavishly, they raised an almost insurmountable barrier against all possible reconciliation. Already both parties had recognised and counted each other. They lay in presence with their arms by their side, waiting for the signal of combat.

Pius IX. brought about an armistice, a reaction in behalf of his sceptered brethren. The Italians are now coming to terms with their princes. Progress is not incompatible with some of them. Italy need not crush, if she can bend them to her views.

Meanwhile, the land was sterile of events: all mute and sad, as in the calm that precedes the storm. Every one recognised an age of transition, of preparation. Every one felt that Italy had no longer any lower degree of dejection to sink into; that, according to the rules of Providence, she had a right to look to the future for brighter days; that all her sons were natural brothers and allies, that their enemy was the same, and their cause one; that God was pleased to associate them in common sufferings, that they might aspire to a common redemption.

Literature, as well as commerce, industry, and all the fine arts, except music, were unproductive. All was paralysed by the great crisis that the clemency of Heaven was slowly maturing. Italian literature in our days was one of constraint and discontent, of transition and expectation, reluctant and murmuring, stifled and tortured. A proud enthusiasm had given a strange relish for silence and melancholy. The Italian bards rent the chords of their harps, shaking their heads with a sullen disdain. "No," they exclaimed, "we shall not sing the lays of our land for the gratification of strangers; we shall not soothe with our

verses the toils of bondmen. Let the brightness of our skies be clouded ; let the fire be quenched in the eyes of the daughters of Italy : the pure enjoyment of the treasures of nature is the exclusive possession of noble souls ; the smiles of beauty should be the sacred reward for high deeds ; the songs of the troubadour are reserved for the delight of the brave, that dare to rival his heroes." The voice of the Italian bards was mute ; they sought the solitude of their groves, the stillness of their ruins, refusing utterance to their sorrows, and obstinately feeding upon them ; or they carried their chagrin beyond mountains and seas, roaming from land to land, among strangers who could not understand them, to pine away slowly and die, like exotic plants drooping under the influence of an ungenial climate, and yielding life without struggle or regret.

But letters in Italy were undergoing the same silent and rapid revolution that we have noticed in politics. In literature also there was an old and a young Italy ; there were the ideas of the old social world, and the wants of the new ; there were classicists and romanticists.

That spirit of scholastic erudition which insinuated itself into Italian literature, even from its primitive era, had by degrees deprived it of all influence on the progress of society. Men of letters, mustered up in their academical ranks, abstracted themselves from life, and lived in the past. Hence, by a strange anomaly, literature had remained behind the age, and foregone its true mission. It had become a luxury, a privilege. It slackened in proportion with all national energy, and either languished in the vain contemplative speculations of the solitary scholar, or was turned by the wily tyrant into an instrument of corruption and connivance. The prince threw gold at the feet of the bard, and the bard stooped to gather it. Art became a trade ; academies were opened, and sent forth rhymesmiths by the score. Pedantry dictated its laws uncontrolled ; the bed of Procrustes was produced, and all

capacities were stretched or mutilated, according to the academical pattern.

This narrow-minded classicism, this retrospective literature, had reached its highest pitch of success towards the close of the last century. It taught that the Greeks and Latins, issuing more freshly from the hands of nature, free from all mixture, free from all specious refinements of an artificial culture, had contemplated and painted nature in her native innocence and graces, smiling with the roses, fragrant with the perfumes of the happy climes of the East; that an instinctive taste for order, proportion, and symmetry, for justness and measure, had early, and as it were, instinctively, determined for them the confines of the beautiful, and naturally dictated the rules of unity for their poems and dramas, with the same judgment that had presided over the construction of their temples and theatres.

It taught that Italy was by birthright a classic land, a vast museum of classic remains and memorials; that her children had inherited that exquisite organisation, and that sober imagination, by which their fathers had chosen to restrain themselves within certain limits, had combined union with vastness and variety, and raised edifices, which are still braving the redoubled efforts of time and man; that the imagination of the northern nations is gloomy, their traditions dark and dreary, like the aspect of their forests; their fancies heavy and dull, like the frown of their sky; that in subjects derived from modern history there is too much matter-of-fact, prosaic notoriety, ever to afford room for poetical fictions; that the speculative sciences have despoiled the modern world of its most charming illusions; that poetry, like painting, loves to contemplate objects fading in the distance, and involved in a mysterious twilight.

It was added, with a strange mixture of hypocrisy and cowardice, that the Christian religion is too awful a sub-

ject, and modern patriotism too delicate, to be prostituted to poetical dreams, to become an object of scoffing profanation, or a source of revolutionary effervescence.

On the other hand, the new school—it matters not whether it be called romantic or independent—proclaimed that literature must spring from life, and take the lead in the progress of society; that it must belong to the age and nation for which it is produced; that it must divine the spirit of the times, and go before it; that religion is poetry, and can derive more evidence from the warmest inspirations than from the most subtle arguments; that among the ancients the type of the beautiful had something too ideal, too abstract, too general; that their poetry was etching, chiselling, not painting; that their notions of symmetry and harmony, their laws of the three unities, depended on local circumstances—on the measure of their rhythm, on the shape of their stage; but that order prescribes no scale of dimensions, that unity is not incompatible with immensity, nay, that immensity is the comprehension of all unities; that the ancients spoke to the imagination or to the senses, not to the heart; that their feelings had too much of earth, while our affections have been sanctified and ennobled by the influence of a pure religion and the progressive refinement of manners; that the Pagan sought all enjoyment in this world, while the Christian places all his expectations beyond it; that, independent of all reasonings, every age must be represented by its own literature; that we may take advantage of the inheritance of past ages, since it has been providentially preserved, but we must have our own productions, and build in our turn for posterity.

These theories, radiant with the light of truth, flattering the revolutionary mood which agitated the mind in Italy, have visibly prevailed over the most active part of the population, the young: and as the jealous governments, by their Vandalic reforms of the universities, and

by the censure of the press, were waging an obstinate war against Romanticism, it ensued that there was no literature in Italy; nor could there ever be any, until letters assumed their place in society, and a new independent literature arose, the literature of action and life.

Now it is precisely in this unsettled state of ephemeral repose, in this kind of inter-act between the past and the future state of things, on the first dawn of a new era, that it appears most opportune to study the moral, political, and literary state of a country in bygone ages.

The history of nations is naturally divided into so many distinct epochs; the same or analogous revolutions take place in regular periods, and their history is never so well studied as during those intervals of silence and torpor during which the exhausted nation supplies its empty vein with new blood, and hardly develops strength for new action; as the geologist, who would explore the crater of a volcano, must wait for an hour in which the mountain lies still and cold, as if spent by the last eruption, and preparing in silence and darkness the glowing materials for the new one.

There has been till now, we may almost say, there is no present in Italy. She had arrived at the end of a weary day, and rested from her toils and sufferings: she is now, perhaps, about to awake a different being, and pursue a new, perhaps an opposite course. Let those who wish to foretell her new destinies study her past vicissitudes. Let our inquiries on the ages of Dante, Michael Angelo, and Galileo, teach us what is to be expected of their descendants; for there is, even in the most distant and disparate events, an admirable chain of causes and effects, some links of which it is not always impossible even for human shortsightedness to trace.

There are valuable works published in all languages on the history and literature of Italy. But both subjects have become of late a new study. The republic of letters

has been formed into a vast association, which tends to bring all branches of learning under one common point of view. In ancient times each science stood by itself; they were placed by the side of each other, without link of connection, without mutual relation to each other.

But, in our days, he who knows any thing must know every thing. Studies have taken an encyclopedical turn. We reduce each science to a system, and refer all sciences to a general system. We compress the huge folios of our fathers within the narrow compass of a manual, and we add to the manual an index that can spare us the trouble of going through it. This is evidently the result of a vital change in the general turn of thought. Men and things diminish and fade in the distance of time as well as of space. The importance that we attach to contemporaneous events and productions renders us blind as to their probable value in the eyes of posterity.

This was especially the case in the stagnating age that preceded the French revolution. The general culture and refinement of that epoch had a natural tendency to treasure up memorials and books with indiscriminate diligence. The spirit of pedantry, bringing all minds to a common level, encouraged the efforts of mediocrity, and the gilded chariot of fame was turned into a mercenary omnibus, taking up passengers at every turning of the road.

The present generation, the posterity of the age of Napoleon, engaged in hard struggles of vital importance, have learned how to economise time and labour. History, in our days, intimately associated with philosophy, only studies the causes and effects of the principal events that affect the general course of social progress, and lets details fall into their relative insignificance. Literature contemplates the works of those few sovereign minds that gave the writings of their age and country characteristic features, and turns with a look of contempt from the servile crowd of imitators. It hushes the mocking-birds, to let

the nightingales be heard alone. Out of a whole library, modern criticism selects only a few volumes; out of a firmament crowded with planets and satellites, it numbers only twenty or thirty stars of the first magnitude.

Moreover, the noble efforts of some illustrious critics, especially German, have shown that the history of literature can be turned to profitable purposes only if considered as connected with the times in which it flourished, and with the political events that exerted a most powerful influence on its progress or decline, without which such works would be merely lists of names, titles, and dates, void of interest and salutary instruction.

Let us be understood that we are not writing the history of Italy or of her literature; our object is only to give some considerations on both subjects, as essentially connected together; to study the sources of Italian greatness in the middle and modern ages, and of its gradual downfall, endeavouring to refer all that is said of the past as a lesson for the present and future.

It would be needless to dwell long on the ever new and ever increasing importance of the study of this old subject. The history of Italy, from the extinction of the Roman empire to the fall of Napoleon, offers the advantage of a complete drama, which we are enabled to embrace at a single glance. The other nations of Europe are rapidly advancing in their career. Italy has stopped at the end of her long evolution, and, if she now starts once more, it will be on a different orbit.

The history and the literature of Italy, from the earliest revival of civilisation in the middle ages down to the age of Leo X., can be fairly considered as the history of the progress of the human mind in all the Christian world. The seeds of civil and religious liberty were first developed on Italian soil; all branches of industry and commerce, of letters and arts, had reached their meridian splendour in that country two long centuries ere a faint twilight began

to break through the darkness that reigned on the other side of the Alps. True, if Italy has sown, others have reaped—what Italy only began, other nations, under better auspices, are now happily accomplishing. True, after that first impulse, her activity has gradually slackened, and she has now—we hear it so frequently repeated that we must have learned it by heart—she has now been left far behind the hindmost of her neighbours.

Still a time has been when she was ruler and mistress, and to that time other nations must look back, if they wish to know their own history. They cannot well understand their own moral and civil institutions without remounting to their sources; they cannot value the production of genius in their own countries, without knowing the full extent of their debt towards that country where genius winged its first flight.

There are many prejudices extant in Europe against Italy, against the ignorance, the corruption, the demoralisation of her inhabitants; but it is also as generally acknowledged that Italians improve on a closer acquaintance, and we know of no example of a foreigner who, after having studied the history and literature of Italy, has not changed his unkind feelings into the warmest admiration and sympathy.

It is not, after mature examination, difficult to perceive how the subject presents itself under a natural division, how the grand chain of events that crowded upon each other in that formerly so busy country, how the annals of so many republics and states, and it may be said, of so many nations, living on the same land and speaking one language, can, however, be reduced to a rational system, according as these infinite divisions and subdivisions offer some general points for analytical survey. Abandoning, therefore, the most approved plans hitherto followed in all works on the subject, we shall attempt to divide the history and literature of Italy into five distinct eras.

I. The first will embrace the middle ages, or the age of darkness. This epoch will comprehend the history of the Italian nations from the time when they sprang vigorously forth from the mixture of the northern and eastern invaders with the remains of the Roman world: it will go back to the sources of modern institutions, manners, and feelings, such as they arose from the contact of the rude but active temper of the conquerors with the corrupted but enlightened manners of the conquered: it will examine the influence exerted upon both by a new religion, which came to soothe, to level, to heal; and, sketching the course of events, it will disclose by what providential magistracy the new seeds of liberty and independence were gradually developed—how, after long struggles between Goths and Greeks, between Lombards and Franks, after long domestic quarrels between popes and emperors, between kings and vassals, tending to disgrace equally the monarchical, the feudal, and the papal system, the popular element was roused from silence in the ardent Lombard and Tuscan cities—that element which a long age of usurpation seemed to have effaced from the body politic, and erased from the memory of mankind; it will relate how the ancient seeds of Greek and Roman lore, buried under the barbaric alluvions, began slowly to germinate in the theological and philosophical universities instituted by Charlemagne and his successors; it will give a short account of the semi-barbarous writings of the fathers of the church, of the monkish chronicles of the middle ages, and of the more active and living pursuits of the doctors of law in the universities of the newly emancipated republics; it will watch the rise and progress of the modern Italian language, making its way with difficulty through the obstacles that a narrow-minded pedantry raised against it, announcing that the present was to bid adieu to the past, and that a new nation was formed. It will examine what influence the glowing poetry of the Arabians and Pro-

vençals, and the warlike songs and gloomy superstitions of the Germans and Normans, may have exerted on the future start of Italian genius, and what share the French *trouvres* and *troubadours* have a right to claim in the glory of Petrarch and Ariosto.

From such a long course of events, and from so many heterogeneous elements, Nature proceeded to the formation of the age of Dante.

II. The second epoch in the age of liberty embraces the glories of the Italian republics from the first sanctioning of the independence of the Lombard cities at the peace of Constance in 1183, down to the last agony of liberty in Florence under the repeated assaults of papal perfidy and imperial violence in 1530. This is the epoch the great history of Sismondi has illustrated. It is an age of strife and movement, of energy and enthusiasm, of blindness and ferocity. A youthful nation, infatuated with the consciousness of its own vigour, restless, credulous, discordant, exhausts its forces to its own destruction. Liberty is no sooner secured than abused. Feudal and democratic elements, Guelphs and Ghibelines, popes and anti-popes, crusades and heresies, feuds between neighbouring cities, factions within the walls of the same city, turn the whole country into a vast field of battle. Meanwhile a confused mass of Roman and barbaric institutions, the collision of a hundred undefined and contradictory rights and privileges, hurry on the social order to its final dissolution. until at length every one of those inconsiderate republics, at different intervals, falls a prey to the tyrant it had nourished in its bosom. But the spirit of liberty breathed over the land—the energies of those disorderly states increased and redoubled in these obstinate struggles. Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, divided the empire of the seas. The manufactures of Milan and Florence supplied all Europe. Italian fleets and chivalry retreated the last of all from Palestine; Italian squadrons routed the Saracens

in Sicily, Sardinia, and Spain, and letters and arts shone with so intense a lustre that no length of time will ever eclipse it.

From the silence of the cloisters where it lay confined, a sterile privilege of sickly old men, the new literature started into life, wild and fiery as the stormy age which it was called to enlighten; a blessed age, when the heart of the writer was glowing, and the hand trembling with the agitation of public life, when the scholar was at once a citizen, a warrior, a magistrate, when genius moved unconfinèd in its orbit, swayed by no power but the feeling of the importance and dignity of its mission. This was the literature of the age of Dante. It embraced the whole of the fourteenth century, but it descended also partially through the following epochs, wherever a faint breath of liberty was found to foster it; it developed itself afresh during the last struggles of Florence, in the pages of Macchiavelli and Varchi; it animated the canvas of Leonardo, and the marble of Michael Angelo; it led, in different pursuits, the last Italian heroes, Colonna, Strozzi, Doria, and Dandolo, to their daring exploits; and the Italian navigators, Columbus, Amerigo, and the Cabots, to their venturous cruises.

III. The third period—the age of domestic tyranny—the age of the Este and the Medici, which, to adopt the common phrase, we shall call “the age of splendour,” commenced at the court of the first Cosmo and his grandson Lorenzo dei Medici, and embraced those golden ages of Leo X., of the first and second Alphonso of Ferrara, down to the last patronage granted to literature by the Dukes of Savoy, by the patrician aristocracy at Venice, and at Rome in the days of Queen Christina of Sweden. From their raging anarchy the Lombard and Tuscan republics had passed under a yoke of terror and blood; the usurpers of their liberties—for the most part monsters in human shape, the annals of whose dominion history blushes to

relate—still obeying the public taste for letters and arts, and the spirit of grandeur and liberality which they inherited from the republics, and which they turned into one of the most efficient instruments of tyranny, they spread over their age a dazzling lustre, which, as it then blinded the people to their true interests, and reconciled them to their gilded chains, so it misleads even now, not unfrequently, the judgment of posterity.

Literature now abode in the courts of Augustus and Mæcenæ. The charms of poetry and eloquence learned to dress flattery in all the pomp of a courtly garb. It was an age of theatres and academies, of refinement and luxury, of ebriety and extravagance.

As the abuse of liberty had led the Italian republics to an immature death, so the abuse of learning had, at the beginning of this period, suffocated Italian literature, which in its outset had soared so high. Owing principally to the heroic efforts of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and their contemporaries, the relics of Greek and Roman lore had been rescued from the oblivious dust of the middle ages. From that moment classical studies absorbed all attention; and all literary capacities in Italy, especially the illustrious friends and guests of Cosmo dei Medici, conspired to the deplorable attempt of reviving the dead languages, to the proscription of the living; and, while filling the libraries with a vast number of Greek and Latin volumes, they left a blank of a hundred years in the national literature, which was sunk and lost, for all that long interval, and nearly plunged into utter oblivion.

Lorenzo dei Medici, at length, anxious to secure his throne upon the basis of popular favour, laboured with his gay retinue at the revival of popular songs. The Este in Ferrara, and the Gonzaga in Mantua, opened a stage for dramas and pastorals. Chivalry having reached its last period, the Italian minstrels—Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso—endeavoured to revive it in their strains. But with the

academies the spirit of imitation and servility had already corrupted literature in its new sources, and clipped the wings of spontaneous genius. The sweet effusions of Petrarch, and the sublimest masterpieces of the Greek stage, were reproduced to infinity in languid and dull parodies by the refined but enervated crowds of the academies, and the ever-warbling swains of Arcadia.

Meanwhile, deterred from the cultivation of letters by the war that had been of late waged against thought, the gentle hearts of Raphael and Correggio turned to a more harmless and mute way of expansion, to the contemplation and the reproduction of the beautiful in the fine arts, an enthusiasm which could no longer find nourishment in the debates of public life; while other spirits of a more ardent temper, impatient of unaccustomed subjection at home, carried among strangers their restless genius, inspired them with their thirst for bold enterprises, guided them to new discoveries by land and by sea, or spread among them the sparkle of light which they had taken from the sun of their country.

IV. Next came the age of foreign dominion, or the age of decline. It commenced with the first invasion of Charles VIII. of France, and ended with the epoch of the French revolution. It was a succession of inroads of French and Spaniards, Swiss and Austrians, by turns invited and expelled by the Italians themselves, until those deluded partisans were forced to acknowledge a master in each of the auxiliaries they had the imprudence to evoke. Yet neither was this deplorable period destitute of high interest, nor did Italian independence set without leaving glorious records. The complete subjection of Italy was the work of three centuries, and the present generation have witnessed the last blows that were struck at it. All this long interval was a progressive school of degradation and baseness, a state of society verging to its utmost decay; an age in which men lost all energy, even for

crime. Such was Italy in the hands of strangers, for, wherever a spark of independence still fluttered, there the Italian spirit renewed its prodigies of valour; and the long struggles of Venice against the Ottoman powers, the wars of the house of Savoy against France and Austria, and the frequent revolts at Naples, Milan, and Genoa, against inquisition and despotism, manifestly revealed a nation crushed, not subdued—slumbering, not dead.

Letters shared in the universal infirmity. It was a literature of inquisitors and Jesuits, of fetters and fagots. It had its origin among the extravagances of Marini, it ended with the effeminacies of Metastasio, and the obscenities of Casti. Not, however, without exceptions: Filicaja and Fulvio Testi, Sarpi and Campanella, and a few other lofty minds, attested that the overflowing corruption had not reached the highest summits; for the human mind, when once roused, cannot be so suddenly repressed, and it turns with redoubled activity to open new ways in proportion as the old ones are closed against it. By the side of the all-chilling Academy della Crusca, the heroic associations for the promotion of science and experiments in natural philosophy, dei Lincei and del Cimento rose, fought, and suffered; and, while Marini abused his genius to dazzle his age with the tinsel of his verses, Galileo amazed the earth with his tidings from heaven.

V. The fifth or last epoch, which we would call Italy at her reawakening, dated from the days of Ferdinand and Leopold of Tuscany, of Francis I. and Joseph II. of Austria, and descended through the convulsions of the French revolution to the present times. It was an age of reaction and recovery, of disgust, of repentance. To the blind and savage sway of the Spaniards had succeeded the tardy and sleepy rule of the Austrians. The last descendants of the Italian reigning families had dropped one by one, for want of succession. The new rulers, by the enjoyment of a long peace, and by the general relaxation of

manners, being now in a state of complete security, had remitted the bloody policy on which their predecessors had based their throne. While some of them indulged in childish but innocent pastimes, others busied themselves with political and religious reforms. A new spirit of life developed itself in the philosophical works of Vico, Beccaria, Filangeri, and Mario Pagano, and in the historical pages of the hero and martyr Giannone: it found a more virtual utterance in the verses of the austere Parini, and in the bronze cast scenes of Alfieri.

Thus geniuses of the highest standing, encouraging and enlightening the royal reformers in their pious intentions, had commenced in the ideas of mankind a general revolution, embracing the whole theory of government and legislation; and the age was, perhaps, not far off, in which Italy might have reaped the highest advantages from that generous emulation between mind and power, between the governed and the governors, for the promotion of public welfare, had not the all-demolishing philosophy of Rousseau and Voltaire—had not the storms that roared on the other side of the Alps—had not the natural impatience of that nation, destined to take the lead of the movement in Europe, only to the ruin of her own affairs and of others, hurried on all things for the worst, involving in her convulsions Italy, her rulers, her philosophers, and their salutary projects. As soon as the general catastrophe of the French revolution had arrived, the new democracy imported from Paris, and the new flame of military glory, left but little leisure for thought. The brightest minds abandoned themselves to the seducing dreams of specious Utopias, they were hurried on from hope to hope, and from disappointment to disappointment, until they found themselves and their country precipitated into a lower abyss than that from which they had so late and so slowly began to emerge.

Still, as it is among the sublimest ways of Divine Providence to prepare the greatest results for the welfare of the nations of the earth in and from their deepest calamities, so it was only when, at the fall of Napoleon, the last traces of Italian existence were nominally and effectually blotted out in the final fate of Venice and Genoa—it was only when it was evident that Austria had power to drive her artillery from one end of the Peninsula to the other—that the name of Italy began to sound clear, glorious and sacred, though undefined, vague, and new in the ears of her sons, and that the desire and will arose in their hearts, ardent, eternal, inextinguishable, of having an Italy.

Italian literature made but little progress in the days of the French revolution. But the powerful influence it began to reassume in the turmoils of those rapid commotions, the enthusiastic and chivalrous character of Ugo Foscolo shining to so great an advantage by the side of the versatile courtiers of Napoleon, Cesarotti and Monti, and of the harmless but inactive dreamer, Pindemonte, raised and dignified the trade of poetry by associating it with the sanctity of patriotism, as minstrelsy was once associated with all the splendour of chivalry: and Italian literature gradually assumed that militant, martyr-like mood that alone befits an age of redemption.

What the thinkers of the age of Leopold of Tuscany had prepared, what the warriors of the age of Napoleon had hastened, the martyrs of our age have, at last, been drawing to a close. The revolutions of Naples and Turin in 1820, the insurrections of Romagna, Modena, and Parma, in 1831, the attempts of Savoy in the following years, are not the battles that Italy fought for her regeneration. They were only the symptoms of a fever that was burning in all her veins, and that must have frequent though ill-timed explosions. Italy had not yet entered the field; hitherto she had only shed the expiatory blood of victims to sanctify

her cause before heaven and earth, and the struggle had been confined within the walls of the dungeons of Spielberg, and at the foot of the scaffolds of Modena.

Italian literature in our age recommended itself to the sympathy rather than to the admiration of strangers. It could not stand the comparison with England and Germany; it could not range by the side of past ages. It was comparatively sterile and silent, but it was equally uncontaminated and pure; but it followed its straightforward course, fearless of the frowns of tyranny, until its sacred mission be accomplished, and that vengeance of Heaven, that visited the misdeeds of our forefathers farther down than the fourth generation, be finally appeased.

The fate of the editors of the "Conciliatore," of the "Antologia," and other organs of public opinion, evidently showed what chance there remained for the champions of truth: the fortunes of Foscolo, Pellico, Botta, and a hundred others, proved how dangerous it was in that country to raise one's head above the common level; and the suspicion and espionage hovering above such as had hitherto escaped uninjured left little to be envied by their brothers in exile abroad.

But we had reason, as may now be seen, to rejoice at such a state of extreme violence; for only in extreme evils extreme remedies are found. That hand that roused Italy from the desolation of the middle ages, that stamped on the serene brow of that queen of nations, "*Esto perpetua*," is hastening to her rescue. Italy had more than once equally languished and revived, and she never sank from her glories without rising younger and greater.

There is, at last, a **PRESENT** for Italy. The stroke of the last hour of the **PAST** ushers in the first hour of the **FUTURE**. Days follow but resemble not each other. There is no delay or intermission in the fulfilment of Heaven's will. Human vicissitudes hang together by one uninterrupted chain of fatality.

God has, at last, mercy on long-enduring Italy ! Her princes may yet desert her. Her Pope, even if infallible, is not immortal. But God is eternal and is with her. Happy, if she learns to trust in Him and herself alone ! Her sorrow has been weighed : her fate is mature. Kings and pontiffs may now work it out. It is not they, however, that prepared it. The spirit that is alive within her, comes direct from the breath of her Maker.

The phoenix has been consumed upon her funeral pyre. Her last breath has vanished in the air with the smoke of her ashes ; but the dawn breaks ; the first rays of the sun are falling upon the desolate hearth ; the ashes begin to heave, and from their bosom the new bird springs forth with luxuriant plumage, displaying her bold flight, with her eyes fixed on that sun from which she derived her origin.

ITALY.

Part I.

THE PAST.



FIRST PERIOD.—MIDDLE AGES.

CHAPTER I.

AN HISTORICAL, ETHNOGRAPHICAL VIEW OF THE MODERN ITALIAN RACES.

Importance of Italy in the Middle Ages—Fall of the Roman Empire—
The Lombards—The Carlovingian Dynasty—The German Emperors—
The Lombard League—The Maritime Towns—The Two Sicilies—The
Popes—Characteristic Differences of the Italians in different Provinces.

FEW spaces in the realms of memory are filled up by more highly interesting scenes than the long interval between ancient and modern civilisation; that period of darkness and violence, which historians have designated by the name of *the Middle Ages*. That epoch was to Europe, what, to the globe, was one of those great convulsions of which only imperfect traditions and vague conjectures reveal to us the ultimate effects. It fixed anew the boundaries of land and water, established in a general equilibrium the hostile elements, traced the course of mountains and the beds of rivers, and gave the surface of the earth its geological physiognomy. The Middle Ages are to us what the heroic times of her demigods were to Greece, fertile in scenes of peril and strife, among which the imagination loves to expatiate, but of which reason cannot desire the reproduction. The spirit of poetry and romance clings to those feudal memorials, as the domestic genius does to the ruins of the ancient Gothic towers and mansions, whose inmates had lived under its

special protection. It seems as if those lofty piles of building could only have been reared by a generation of giants, and before them we feel disposed to look upon ourselves as a degenerate race.

But the Middle Ages are fertile in more salutary lessons than can be derived from poetical or romantic inspiration. There is hardly in the existing order of society a single political, religious, commercial, or scientific system, not essentially dating, by its origin or by its reorganisation, from the convulsions of that tempestuous era. Hence the efforts of men of superior talents have for many years been chiefly directed to the task of dispelling the clouds that had long settled upon those ages; nor is it likely that their pursuits on so great a subject will cease, as long as there remain parchments to unroll, inscriptions to decipher, or ruins to unbury.

There was, in that period of general social dissolution, one country, in which the work of devastation commenced much later, and ended much sooner. Italy in the Middle Ages was like Mount Ararat in the deluge; the last reached by the flood, and the first left. The remains of the Roman social world were either never utterly dispersed in that country, or far later than any where else; and, if we are to date the close of the Middle Ages from the extinction of feudalism, that revolution was effected in Italy no less than three centuries before the time of Charles VIII. of France, the epoch assumed by historians as the close of the period. The history of Europe in the Middle Ages must necessarily be referred to Italy, as the history of the ancient world has always been referred to Rome. The great ascendancy of the papal power, and the influence of Italian genius on the literature and the fine arts of all countries, made Italy essentially the centre of light, the sovereign of thought, the metropolis of civilisation.

The history of Rome and the history of modern Italy

are no more related to each other than a tragedy is to the after-piece. Not only the nations and their language, not only manners and morals, laws and gods, have given place to others; not only the monuments of men have been swept from the face of the land; but the land itself, its general aspect, and its very climate, are changed.

The fall of the Roman empire under the invasion of the northern nations was, for Italy not less than the rest of the world, an event as desirable as it was inevitable. Rome and Roman Italy had ceased to live long before any foreign nation even ventured across the Alps. It was a superannuated body, which, in the last struggle against imminent dissolution, by an animal instinct summoned all its vital principles to the heart, only to witness the fate of its members, and prepare for its own. Rome, as is related of a few fortunate pirates and robbers, after escaping all the trials of a life of peril and violence, was consumed by inanition, and died of old age.

The barbaric invasion had then the effect of an inundation of the Nile. It found a land exhausted with its own efforts, burning and withering under the rays of the same tropical sun which had called into action its productive virtues, and languishing into a slow decay, from which no reaction could ever redeem it. Then, from the bosom of unexplored mountains, prepared in the silence of untrodden regions, the flood roared from above—the overwhelming element washed away the last pale remnants of a faded vegetation; but the seasons had their own course. Gardens and fields smiled again on those desolate marshes, palms and cedars again waved their crests to the skies in all the pride of youth, as if singing the praises of the Creator, and attesting that man alone perishes, and his works—but Nature is immortal.

The slow process of depopulation, by which the corruption of the capital had wasted the fairest provinces, was hurried for the worst by the ruthless rage of the

conquerors. What yet remained cultivated and inhabited was trampled under the hoofs of the horses of Alaric. They came: they enjoyed all the luxury of destruction, but they and their myriads vanished among the ruins of the country, like a river lost among the sands which it heaps up at its mouth*.

Until the age of Odoacer and Theodoric†, there was nothing but ravage and ruin. But by this time the advantage of a superior culture, and the influence of a purer religion, had softened the iron hearts of the North, and, under the auspices of these two monarchs, the first stone was laid of the new social edifice.

But the fates of Italy were not fulfilled. That last citadel of the ancient empire could not be taken before the ditches were filled up and the intrenchments paved with the bodies of the brave, who devoted themselves for their followers. The reign of Theodoric stands alone, in those ages of darkness, like a beautiful star in a retired spot of the heavens; but his successors, harassed by civil discords, and engaged in long struggles against the Greeks of Belisarius and Narses, lay finally at the mercy of a new enemy, who, invited as a mediator in the contest between Greeks and Goths, ended by possessing himself, without resistance, of the prize.

The crowning of Alboin, king of the Lombards, in Italy, about the year 568, must be considered as the epoch of the great crisis which divided ancient from modern Italy. Here we lose the traces of the old religion and language: since then Rome, and all the charm of her name, belong to the past.

The Lombards were in Italy what the Saxons were in England. They were considered as the bravest, the

* Rome taken by Alaric, A.D. 410. Invasion of Attila, 451. Storming of Rome, by Genseric, 455.

† Odoacer, king of Italy, A.D. 476. Theodoric, 493.

freest, as well as the most barbarous of all barbaric races. Their ranks had been thinned in their long struggles on the other side of the Alps, but they were followed by innumerable allies and subjects; and, the conquest of Italy not having cost them a drop of blood, the whole host settled on the land, rather as new tenants than conquerors. They carried along with them their wives and families—all they held dear in life. They left nothing behind them to regret. Long since a tribe of wanderers, they cherished their adopted home with that fatal enthusiasm with which fair Italy is but too apt to inspire all foreigners. They shared the lands with the conquered, or rather they seized upon the lands the conquered had abandoned. They adopted the religion of Italy—Italy adopted their morals: laws and language were mixed, and the opposite elements were cemented by a long and comparatively peaceful contact of nearly two centuries. The scattered remains of the Vandals and Goths of the previous invasions were easily adopted as sons by the conquering tribe, by right of consanguinity; and the Latin nation, already reduced to atoms, was either dispersed or assimilated.

Together with their martial spirit, their active and laborious habits, their love of home, and their domestic virtues, the German nations gave Italy, as well as all Europe, that form of government, of which we have in our times witnessed the final catastrophe,—the feudal system. From the top of the Alps, the northern chief pointed out to his warriors the fair land that Fate had awarded to their valour. The land of promise was no sooner subdued and divided among them, than it was necessary to put it in a state of defence. The conquering host settled on the country, as it were, in battle array. Every soldier was at his post, dependent upon his *vassals*, under the continued discipline of the camp.

It appears that the Lombards exercised a milder rule

over their Latin subjects than either the Franks in Gaul, or the Vandals in Spain and Africa; but the Italian population had already suffered so much under the previous invasions, that the whole nation might be considered as doomed to absolute servitude.

Such a state of violence, however, could not last. The Latin population had long since learned submission and patience. Respected and dreaded, the conquerors soon became weary of an unprofitable tyranny. There is no man willing to strike where he meets with no resistance. The idea of allegiance to their chiefs, so strong among the warriors of the north, was easily communicated to the Latins, to whom no better choice was left. The evils of feudalism gave way in the same measure as the characteristic differences of the two races disappeared; in the same measure as, involved in common vicissitudes, they needed each other's cooperation.

Meanwhile a religion of meekness and charity called the blessings of heaven on the warrior who spared the prostrate foe, and who dried the tears his sword had caused to be shed. Religion and gallantry soon made humanity an indispensable appendage of true valour. Thus chivalry, or rather the chivalrous spirit, was a consequence of the feudal system, as it was an antidote against its evils.

But the Lombards did not subdue the whole country. The maritime cities of the Adriatic and of the Mediterranean, garrisoned by the Eastern emperors, and defended by the hunted down Latins, who came to them for a refuge, offered a long and not unsuccessful resistance. But Rome, which, though nominally acknowledging the sovereignty of the Cæsars of Constantinople, already, in fact, obeyed the influence of the pontiffs, proved a more insurmountable obstacle to the Lombard ambition. The Franks, always restless neighbours during the whole period of the Lombard dominion, now invited by the

popes, marched twice to their rescue, and finally relieved them from all fear, by putting an end to the dynasty of Alboin*.

But this last convulsion had not the same effects which the preceding inroads had upon the country. Charlemagne led an army with him, not a nation. He found a settled and a flourishing state, which he had no wish, or no interest, to disturb. The Lombard dukes had long since, by their feudal rivalries, been disposed to defection. The cause of the crown was no longer their cause. They favoured a conquest that was to sanction that independence which they had, in fact, already usurped. The whole nation laid down their arms, either through treason or surprise. Those who could fight would not, and those who would could not. The French king, having opened an unknown road across the Alps, arrived in the heart of the kingdom without unsheathing his sword. Having thus rescued the pope, threatened by the Lombards, and settled in haste his new conquest, he led his host to the accomplishment of his most Christian vow of baptizing the Saxons in blood, and left the national body of the Lombards safe and untouched, with nothing changed but the royal dynasty.

The subjection of Italy to Charlemagne and his successors was little more than a nominal vassalage. The Lombard dukes and marquises, already absolute masters of their own estates under their national dynasty, increased their powers without limit under the French dominion, whose conquest they boasted to have favoured by their ignominious desertion. Some of them, such as the duke of Benevento, were never definitely subdued by the conqueror himself; but no sooner had his vast empire fallen into the hands of his degenerate descendants, than the

* Charlemagne's conquest of Italy, A.D. 774. His coronation at Rome, Christmas-day, 800.

independence of the Italian lords became more and more unquestionable, and the princes of the house of France, invited and expelled by turns by the factions of their unruly vassals, were forced to abdicate their precarious dignity. (A.D. 888.)

The sceptre of Italy, thus fallen from their hands, successively passed from one to another of the Italian dukes, until, exhausted by their national feuds, and harassed by the Hungarians in the north and the Saracens in the south, they were compelled to resign their claims into the hands of the German, Otho the Great, who by his virtues and firmness restored peace to the best part of the Peninsula. (A.D. 961.)

From Otho and the princes of his family, but much more from their successors of the houses of Franconia and Swabia, date those long and envenomed quarrels between papal arrogance and imperial ambition, which shook the social order in Germany and Italy to its very foundation.

We are now approaching the great crisis, during which the long faults and misdeeds of the rulers opened the eyes of the astonished multitude, and awoke them from their torpor. Till now the Italians had been silent and passive, but not blind spectators of amazing scenes. They had seen, during the Carlovingian dominion, emperors and monarchs, whose persons they were used to deem sacred and inviolable, deposed, imprisoned, and put to death by their rebellious vassals. They had seen, during the German dynasty, the descendant of the Cæsars kneeling to the successor of St. Peter, and the haughty priest trampling under his foot the head of the anointed of the Lord. They had seen two or more popes at one time styling all their rivals false prophets and antichrists, and, at the end of the contest, the conqueror received as the chosen of God. Nothing was any longer sacred in the eyes of the people; they knew no power but from the evils it inflicted—they acknowledged no law but the right of the stronger,

and it was not long before they perceived that they themselves were the stronger.

The frequent inroads of so many different armies had placed the whole country in a state of continual alarm. The feudal lords, secure in their eyries reared in the fastnesses of the Alps and Apennines, in hours of danger left the plain utterly unprotected. In progress of time the cities, abandoned to themselves, claimed the right to provide for their own safety by raising their walls, which had lain prostrate ever since they had been levelled to the ground by the barbaric invasions. The youth of the cities were bred up to the use of arms, and this practice inspired them with a boldness springing from a consciousness of their own strength.

Respected from without, the cities became reluctant to all submission within. In proportion as they rose in wealth and prosperity, they became warmly and obstinately attached to those municipal privileges and immunities which since the age of Otho I. were granted to all the imperial cities. Their feudal lords, whom the policy of the German emperors had always conspired to weaken by division, were obliged to give way to their mutinous subjects, and retired to their manors, where they were soon in their turn to receive laws from the cities.

Thus that feudal system, which, though imperfectly, was first introduced into Italy by the Lombard kings, and proved fatal to its institutors, improved and enlarged by the successors of Charlemagne, ended by snatching the sceptre from their hands; but the contagious spirit of insubordination, of which that system had set the first example, turned against the system itself; and democracy rose against feudalism with that same success with which feudalism had overthrown monarchy. This was a slow and indefinite work, the different periods and progress of which it would not be easy to trace. It was not a conspiracy, and not an insurrection; it was the fruit of sad

experience, a long school of disasters and sufferings ; it was a general tendency to association and brotherhood, an imperceptible but uninterrupted series of concessions and encroachments, a gentle spirit of resistance, at first faint and passive, but which was to end by carrying every thing before it. It was one of the many wonders which Providence matures under its shade of mystery, and commits to the slow working of time.

As early as the beginning of the eleventh century, the people, especially in Lombardy, acknowledged no rule. Only their fondest reminiscences of the past still bound them to the name of the Roman empire, to which they referred all their hopes for the unity and greatness of their country. The imperial crown, revived after long oblivion to be laid on the brows of French, and more lately of German monarchs, still preserved all the prestiges that the earliest associations of the national glories had attached to it. But the repeated usurpations of feudalism, a succession of stormy elections in Germany, and the long contests between the altar and throne in Italy, had long since undermined the foundations of the imperial power in the same measure as it had stripped the imperial purple of all its splendour and dignity. That last shade of power and dignity Italy would never have attempted to shake off, but for the ambition of a man who, by calling the rights of the people into question, was to give those rights a sacred, indisputable sanction.

Frederic Barbarossa, a young emperor distinguished by eminent political talents, no less than by chivalrous valour, and by a generous and steady temper, having succeeded in captivating all spirits in Germany, beheld with an indignant look the free air of the emancipated townships of Italy.

Seconded, by a rare occurrence, by the unanimous efforts of Germany, he crossed the Alps to recall the rebels to their allegiance. There was a long and calamitous strug-

gle. The flower of the German youth were called to find their tomb on the Lombard plain. The most flourishing cities of Italy were burned and rased to the ground. But the hand of the Lord of hosts was with the champions of liberty. The scourges of God conspired to thin the ranks of the invaders. The Roman pontiffs, for once the friends and allies of the country, made the national contest the cause of heaven. Prodigies of more than Roman heroism were performed before the walls of Crema, Tortona, and Milan. Finally, hardened by long trials, and glowing with the fire of patriotism, the bare breasts of undisciplined burghers stood all the shock of the heavy chivalry and of the scythed chariots of Frederick—the proud host was routed and scattered, and its leader learned, for the first time, the “bitter steps of flight.”*

The contest of the Lombard league was among those few in which right and wrong were not, as usual, indiscriminately blended. The battle of Legnano was one of those combats which all humanity applaud—for which, as for Morat and Morgarten, we are prompted to thank and praise Providence that men were taught to unravel the iron from the bowels of the earth to plunge it into each other's bosoms—one of those few fields in which human blood fell sacred and holy, like Christ's own blessed blood, which was also shed for the universal emancipation of mankind.

The peace of Constance, signed 1183, and guaranteeing the independent rights of the Italian cities, thus ended a contest that had continued nearly thirty years—the first and noblest struggle in modern Europe between liberty and despotism. The peace of Constance closed the Middle Ages for Italy, and gave her for a long time the lead among

* Frederic Barbarossa enters Italy, A.D. 1154. Burning of Tortona, 1155. Siege and destruction of Crema, 1159. Milan rased to the ground, 1162. Lombard League, 1163. Building of Alexandria, 1166. Battle of Legnano, May 29, 1176. Peace of Constance, June 29, 1183.

the civilised nations. The emancipation of the Helvetian and Hanseatic leagues followed at a later period, nor were they of so general and so great an importance, nor was the resistance so long and sublime, nor was independence bought at so high a price. Six armies, successively drawn from the most warlike nation of Europe, led by an emperor than whom there never was one wiser or mightier from Otho I. to Charles V., failed in subduing the undisciplined militia of unorganised towns, a great number of which marched under the imperial standard.

But, even before the largest and most compact part of the nation had arrived at such a happy result, the maritime cities had preceded the inland towns in ensuring their own independence.

The Italian sea-ports, secure in their impregnable situation, remained under the protection of the Greek emperors, and had in many instances sheltered the last relics of the Latin population from the rage of the barbaric invasions.

The Cæsars of Constantinople, however, generally a wicked and feeble race, were obliged, for self-defence, to withdraw from what they still called their province of Italy the protecting garrisons to the centre of the empire, and the Italian towns, left to their own resources, obtained or usurped the right of raising armies and fleets; and in proportion as they began to suffice, they also felt that they belonged to themselves. In process of time religious persecutions excited among the Italians hatred against a power which had hitherto been borne with contempt, and every bond to Constantinople was broken.

First to spring into her young and vigorous existence was the queen of the Adriatic, Venice. This glorious and unfortunate republic, whose origin is coeval with the first calamities of Rome, founded by a few illustrious exiles of the neighbouring shores, from the times of the first inroads of Alaric and Attila, received into its walls the vic-

tims of all the successive disasters. Arising, as it were, from the ashes of ancient Italy, Venice was destined to be the first lustre of modern Italy. Her efforts, however, were early turned towards her native element, and for a long time she preserved herself neutral and stranger to the incessant convulsions of the main land*.

On the other side Pisa and Genoa, from the beginning of the eleventh century free and independent states, already appear manfully struggling against the Saracens of Sicily and Spain, subduing Sardinia and Corsica, and rivaling Venice in her eastern emprises. The origin of these three republics, as indeed of all the free states of the Middle Ages in Italy, is buried amid the darkness of ages; the fame of their victories is but imperfectly preserved in their annals, and the very names of many of the heroes that led them to their daring achievements are utterly lost to posterity†.

Far different were the destinies of the south. The southern towns of Magna Græcia and Sicily, from immemorial time settled by Greek colonies, clung with more fondness to the eastern empire, and their nominal allegiance to the throne of Constantinople was never entirely shaken off, though they enjoyed long since an almost uncontrolled independence.

But, as early as the first period of the Carolingian dynasty, the Saracens of Africa, who longed for an opportunity to carry their ravages on the plains of green Italy, led by the renegade Euphemio di Messina, landed in Sicily, and inflicted upon that fairest of islands a havoc and slaughter from which it never recovered. By this

* The inhabitants of the Venetia repair to the Lagoons of the Adriatic, from the invasion of Attila, A.D. 452. Election of the first Doge, 697. Building of Venice, near the island of Rialto, 809. St. Mark patron of the city, 829. Istria and Dalmatia united to the Republic, 997.

† Pisa and Genoa conquer Sardinia (A.D. 1017-1050). Conquest of the Balearic Islands, 1113.

work of destruction the Africans having secured their conquest, they turned their arms to Sardinia and Corsica, and granted no truce to the adjacent shores of the main land*.

It was among the hostilities between these new barbarians, the Lombards of Benevento and Salerno and their Grecian rulers, that the cities of Naples, Amalfi, and Gaeta, set up their independent standards, and, secure in the strength of their walls and the skill of their vessels, they bore a long struggle, gallantly riding from one end to the other of the Mediterranean, free as the waves which they furrowed, and the winds which waved their standards.

But towards the end of the tenth century a new people, or rather a handful of pious Norman adventurers, settling at first merely as private knights and auxiliaries, by a rare valour and a more rare policy, ended by subduing the last remains of the ancient Lombard principalities of Benevento, Salerno, and Capua, as well as the Greeks and Saracens; and the free cities themselves, which had invoked their protection, were forced to acknowledge their sway†.

Thus, in less than half a century, and about half a century before the peace of Constance assured for the north of Italy the free enjoyment of democratic institutions, the monarchical and feudal system was founded in the south by the Normans—a basis of that edifice which has lasted until our days, the kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

The efforts of the Lombard league, crowned by the peace of Constance, secured for all Italy the uninterrupted enjoyment of her independence. The contest was not essentially renewed till early in the following century by Frederic II., grandson of Barbarossa, and heir to the most eminent qualities of his predecessor.

* Invasion of Sicily by the Saracens, A.D. 828.

† Conquest of the Two Sicilies by the Normans, A.D. 1041—1090. Fall of Amalfi, 1131. Conquest of Naples, 1138.

This young monarch, who united to the imperial dignity the crown of the Two Sicilies, devolving upon the house of Swabia after the extinction of the Norman line, was early engaged in envenomed feuds against the holy see and the free states of northern Italy, which papal intrigues had enlisted in his cause. Divided as they were by their ancient factions of Guelphs and Ghibelines, the last of whom stood by the emperor, the Lombard league still proved too formidable an adversary for the imperial might. Harassed by the inveterate hatred of the popes, deserted by his barons and allies, disheartened by the rebellions of his children, notwithstanding some signal victories, Frederic, routed by the Guelphs at Parma, and his son being taken prisoner at Bologna, was forced to give up the contest, and died overcome by his disasters *. His sons, Conrad and Manfred, heirs to the throne of Naples and Sicily, but not to the imperial crown, were successively overthrown by the popes, and with them the Ghibeline faction and the imperial influence lost for awhile their ascendancy.

During the wars against the second Frederic, the cities of Tuscany, and those of the duchy of Spoleto and the Marches of Ancona, either joined the common league of the Lombards, or formed new alliances between themselves; but, through the artful insinuations of the popes, the latter were induced to place themselves under the immediate patronage of the holy see, and the former declared themselves, and were for a long time, the best champions of the Guelph party, and of the rights of the church. Still, whilst nations trembled, and monarchs cowered before the thunders of the Vatican,—notwithstanding the real or supposed donations of Constantine, Pepin, and Charlemagne, and the more substantial bequest of the

* Frederic II. crowned, A.D. 1220. Renewal of the Lombard League 1226. The Lombard allies defeated at Cortenova, 1237. Frederic II. routed at Parma, 1248. Hensius, his son, vanquished at Bologna, 1249. Death of Frederic, 1250.

Countess Matilda,—notwithstanding the talents and boundless ambition of Gregory VII. and the popularity of Alexander III., it was only by gradual usurpations that the popes dared to extend their influence over the neighbouring states; and their power was still far from being thoroughly established even in Rome. This city, which had hitherto nominally acknowledged the sway, first of the eastern, afterwards of the French and German empire, had, in fact, either been ruled by papal theocracy, or, breaking into endless rebellions and feuds, had been plunged for whole ages into a state of absolute anarchy. The papal power seemed to be more systematically settled in Rome by Innocent III. in the days of Frederic II.; but it was for more than three centuries warmly disputed, and more than once entirely shaken off, so difficult a task it was then to teach the Italians the arts of servitude.

From the epoch of the crowning of Alboin, we have dated the first setting in of the Middle Ages in Italy. From the peace of Constance we enter into the age of Italian liberties. All the events that took place during that long night of six centuries seem to lead to this happy result—Italy recalled into existence. By this time the northern hive of invading nations was exhausted; the Normans had been the last tribe wandering in search of a home; the foundation of the great monarchies of Europe was laid. Armies and fleets were still busy in their works of destruction, but each nation had settled within defined limits, and belonged to the soil no less than the forests and mountains among which they had chosen their abode.

The original marks of their different primitive descent can still be perceived, even after such a long lapse of years, and after so many vicissitudes, in the features and characters of the inhabitants of the several districts of the country, offering an infinite variety to the observer, seldom to be found in other countries.

It has been generally remarked, as a subject of reproach,

that the Italians are a degenerate race, unworthy of treading a soil that once bred the conquerors of the world. But the inhabitants of Italy have no need, if they have no right, to claim their descent from the Romans of old. The name of Italy and Italians, even in modern times, is too beautiful for that people to envy any nobler appellation. The annals of Milan, Florence, and Venice, give them arguments enough for national pride. The names of Dante, of Columbus, of Galileo, which they possess in common, have little to dread from a comparison with the fairest names of antiquity. Unfortunately, even this modern appellation conveys a vague, indeterminate meaning. There exists no Italy, except on the maps and in the heart of a few believers; there is no people entitled to the appellation of Italians; and the subjects of the kings of Sardinia or Sicily, or of any other of those petty states, are called so by foreigners only by way of courtesy, as the title of lord is given to the eldest sons of English peers, as a designation, not of what they are, but of what they will be one day. The confines of the eight or ten divisions into which the country is now dismembered were laid only according to the arbitrary rule of fortune, founded on the rights of marriages, alliances, and successions, by which Italian lands were always cast into the scales of European diplomacy, to balance accounts. But nature had drawn other lines of demarcation between the sons of Italy, in consequence of their different origin and of the different career they have run, which might have perhaps been an obstacle to future union and concord, had not the arbitrary dealing of her conquerors so far violated those natural limits that it is now no easy task to discover their traces.

The population of the Vales of the Po and Adige, of all that vast tract that lies between the Alps and the Apennines down to the Adriatic Sea, and which is still distinguished by the vague appellation of Lombardy, the fairest as well as the richest part of the country, preserves

eminent marks of its northern origin. This beautiful plain, fenced, as it were, by its two snowy ridges, smiling like a garden, spreading like an ocean, with a hundred rivers rushing from the hills, a hundred towns glittering on the plain, crowded with ten millions of human beings, blessed with a severer but a healthier climate, dividing the vaunt of being the best cultivated land in Europe, only with England and Holland, exhibits all the vigour of an eternal youth. Since immemorial time the field where all Christian combats were fought, since three centuries the prey of all foreigners, it seems to derive from the inexhaustibleness of its soil the sources of exuberant vitality.

The Lombards (by which appellation ought to be understood, not only the actual subjects of Austria, but all the people distinguished by kindred dialects, such as the Piedmontese, the inhabitants of Parma, Modena, Bologna, and Romagna, down to Ravenna, and Rimini) are to be distinguished among the sons of Italy by their fair hair and complexion, large serene eyes, tall and portly but seldom elegant forms; they are of a sanguine temper, which is often turned into apathy in mature age. Living in a rich country, they are early addicted to epicurean tastes, and their comparative tardiness of mind, joined to their fondness for animal enjoyments, have won them from their southern brothers the appellation of Lombard wolves, or Bœotians of Italy. But from the earliest ages they displayed the greatest talents in agriculture, commerce, and industry; and though they came late into such business, they perhaps still excel, in our days, in the useful as well as in the fine arts, and in every branch of science and letters. The Lombards are a true, generous, and hospitable race; though perhaps slow and phlegmatic, plain and credulous, they participate in some degree in the best and worst qualities of their neighbours, the Germans. But on their firmness and constancy lie the best hopes of the country; they are the stoutest hearts in the day of battle; and the veterans

are not all dead of those Lombard legions who less than thirty years ago used to drive Austrians and Hungarians before them, all over the continent.

Venice, owing, as we have seen, its origin to the barbaric invasions, was, perhaps, the only spot in all Italy pure from barbaric mixture. The Venetian aristocracy, the noblest of all aristocracies, hardened by the constant exertions demanded by their situation, inflamed by a sincere though perhaps selfish patriotism, displayed for a long time a valour worthy of a better fate. The dark and bloody policy which stained the last period of that ill-fated republic has been, we think, too long exposed and execrated even to exaggeration, and it is full time that peace should be granted, at least, to the memory of Venice, since little more than her memory remains. Her native element, the sea, is now receding from her lagoons, like a faithless friend in the hour of adversity; and she lies down lifeless and mute, a spectre city, insensible of her rapid decay, dead almost to the fondest hopes and to the revengeful wrath universally cherished in the Italian bosoms, as if the sentence that laid her low were irrevocable, and the hour of Italian redemption, however soon it may strike, would always be too late for the revival of Venice.

The Genoese, secure in the barrenness of their rocks, the descendants of the fierce Ligurians, escaped foreign mixture to a great extent, and preserved their hardy and thrifty habits through the Roman and all the following phases. Genoa, the queen of the Mediterranean, sitting on her hills like a wide amphitheatre of marble, crowned with her row of towering palaces, stretching her arms on her sea—that bluest of seas—in the attitude of sovereignty—Genoa, like Venice, arising from liberty, survives her liberty; struck by the same blow by which Venice was undone, she preserves all the nerve of her cohesive vitality.

The Genoese, still acknowledged as the best sailors in the Mediterranean, the most uncontaminated race in Italy,

sober, enduring, indefatigable—as if to scorn the assertion that activity and hardihood are incompatible with a soft, luxurious climate—are to be known, not only amidst the Italians, but among any other nation they mix with, even after several generations, for their sharp but keen features, their small black eyes, their short and agile stature, and their harsh and truly barbarous dialect. Joining a spirit of pomp and show to their sparing habits and to their proverbial avarice, they have raised temples and palaces with more magnificence than taste, but they have warred against all difficulties of nature, and raised their gardens and villas on the crags of the Apennines, and on the sands of the sea. A race of rovers and adventurers, they settle in the four parts of the globe, and their device is: “*Ubi bonum ibi patria;*” and yet no people are more fond or more proud of their native land, nowhere are national traditions and prejudices more inveterately cherished.

But above the shores of Genoa, and along the whole chain of the Apennines down to Abruzzo and Calabria, there lives a primitive race, distinguished by many names in different districts, but still one and the same race, entirely unknown to all foreign visitors,—perhaps that same rude population of the Aborigines that gave up the shores and the plains to civilisation, and retired to the crest of the mountains for the enjoyment of independence, and which, under no government, the weight of bondage can reach. Too poor for taxation, too undisciplined for military conscription, those mountaineers are left to be governed by themselves, or, at the best, by their priests. These are the men against whom all the power and policy, all the summary justice of Napoleon failed; from their numbers the ranks are supplied of those smugglers and banditti, whose exploits, disfigured by the exaggerations of romance, are still forming the delight of idle readers.

Tuscany, in all times, perhaps even before the Grecian era, the ruler of letters and arts, is now occupied by a soft,

gentle, highly refined people, in whose slender and gracile frames, in whose elegant but effeminate features, it would not be easy to recognise the successors of those fierce partisans who, after receiving liberty as a gift from their brothers of Lombardy, were so loose and violent in abusing it, but no less warm and intrepid and desperately obstinate before they consented to give it up.

Traces of the antique Tuscan valour are to be found in Arezzo, in Pistoia, and wherever, indeed, you rise towards the Apennines; but the capital, Florence the beautiful, the Athens of modern Italy, she alone the mother of genius, who has given birth to a greater number of eminent men than all the rest of Italy put together,—Florence is now, or was very lately, idly and voluptuously lying in the lap of her green vale of Arno, “like a beautiful pearl set in emerald,” as if lulled by the murmur of her river, and by the fascination of the smiles of her climate. Sinking into a state of dejection, proportionate to the excitement of the ages of the Strozzi, worn out, undermined, enervated by a long peace, and by the artful tyranny of their princes, these people seemed scarcely aware that silken ties have power to bind men as fast as iron chains. Gay and thoughtless, vain of their bygone greatness, of their polished language, of their wide-spread scholarship, of their nice taste, of their villas, of their churches and of themselves,—the Florentines were called, perhaps not unjustly, the French of Italy.

Rome, sitting in an unhealthy desert, a venerable corpse, a dissolute convent of prelates and cardinals, presented—up to the accession of Pius IX.—a still more melancholy spectacle. Its vast empire and influence reduced to a pile of tottering ruins, the head of a church that had outlived her age, the capital of a state in open rebellion,—Rome, like Tithonus of the fable, had reached the last stage of decrepitude, without being permitted to die. Not only the capital, but all the provinces south of the Apennines, the

lands of the Sabini and Umbri, had contracted that levitical spirit, by which all talents and eminence were exclusively directed to the altar and its intrigues. Hence that tinge of Jesuitism that tainted the Roman character in the highest classes, painted as it were in the lines of their countenance, in the sound of their mellifluous accent.

Only what was not priest in Rome, or priestly in family, or connection, or servants of priests—the populace of the eternal city, the *Transteverini*, displayed still in their features, costume, and manners, and more in their sudden and often generous sallies of passion, the antique Roman air, such as might, with a better education, become one day the freemen of the capital of the redeemed country.

The southern part of the peninsula, and the adjacent island, Sicily, were early settled by Dorian colonists, who gave the maritime part of the country an indelible Grecian character. Magna Græcia had schools, games, poets, and philosophers, which rivalled those of the father-land. The Romans conquered, but did not demolish; they took from the Greeks more than they gave. They never changed what was good with the hope of doing better. At the fall of the western empire those Greek seaports remained, as we have seen, to the Greeks. The Saracens never had long abode beyond the Straits of Messina, and the Normans were too few to print any durable trace on the national character.

Hence the character of the Neapolitans (as Botta observes) is essentially Greek, and their levity and playfulness, their taste for sophisms and specious arguments, as well as their national dances and festivals,—all is Greek among them. The calamities of the feudal system, of the Provençal, Spanish, and Austrian yoke, by turns afflicted and quenched the liveliness of that unfortunate population, so that so large a part of the country never played a very conspicuous part in its annals.

The people of the capital and of the paradise of Cam-

pania, never very active or energetic, are now perhaps more destitute of dignity and noble feelings than any other race in Italy; while the provinces, under a stupid, improvident administration, wallow in ignorance and misery, without industry, without commerce, nay, without any intercourse with the civilised world. Yet it must not be forgotten that that is the land of volcanoes and earthquakes—that we tread on the ashes of half-quenched fires, which can revive and glow with sudden ignition. What the Neapolitans want in education and culture, they make up by natural intelligence and discernment. What in other countries is the fruit of long experience and study is there the result of sudden fits and starts.

Thus, in all late conspiracies or insurrections, the lowest classes displayed a quickness of apprehension, a prudence, an energy, which needed only to be better guided to arrive at the most serious results; for it must be remarked that, in the Roman and Neapolitan states, the populace is physically and morally a better race than the nobler and higher classes, because those *Transteverini* and *Lazzaroni* are, what they look, the genuine stock of those Greeks and Romans who subdued and enlightened the world; while the nobility are the descendants of Normans and other strangers, who, transplanted into a softer climate, degenerated from their original vigour without being well acclimated to their adopted country.

The islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, a desolation of swamps and morasses, with the *malaria* gaining ground over them, as the sands of the desert over the fertile shores of Barbary—without roads, without canals, with scarcely any sign of agriculture, and yet so smiling, so lovely, so spontaneously rich—will be one day returned, together with the Tuscan and Pontine marches, into the hands of Italy, (whenever there shall be an Italy,) to be reconquered inch by inch from the plague to which the

perversity of fortune and negligence of men have abandoned them.

The traces of the Moorish spirit, the noble and chivalrous, sober and melancholy, but revengeful and passionate temper, which characterises the Spanish blood, remain easily distinguishable in the dark olive complexion, in the pale, bilious countenance, in the guttural accent, of those islanders. More addicted to mental than bodily exercise, fond of meditation and solitude, their passions acquire in depth what they lose in vehemence. Ambitious, vindictive, and fanatic, they pursue their schemes with unremitting perseverance, whether they meditate the deliverance of their country or the subjugation of the world. Placed in favourable circumstances, it is not very rare to find in Sicily a Procida, in Corsica a Napoleon.

These different origins of the Italian races, and their physical and moral discordance of temperament, are no longer, as we have said, an impediment to the hopes of future unity or confederacy, notwithstanding the contrary opinion emitted by foreign politicians and even cherished by a few narrow-minded patriots; no more so than the same obstacle prevents now Welsh, Scotch, and English, heterogeneous races, from living at peace under the same commonwealth, in spite of their old bloody grudges and long-indulged antipathy. The Italians have long since recovered from their municipal jealousies; they have been all educated in a severe school of common misfortunes, and the sons of different races have exchanged sympathy and hospitality at home, or joined their hands as brothers abroad in the hour of exile. But are not even now, and since more than three centuries, Milan and Pavia, Pisa and Florence, Naples and Palermo, the most inveterate rival cities, obeying the same rule? Shall then brute force and oppression prevail over the feelings of men better than the progress of civilisation and humanity—

better than a hard-won experience and a sense of common interests? Shall liberty fail where despotism succeeded?—shall independence revive what a long bondage has quenched? Ah, no! all their memories and hopes, the cultivation of the same language and literature, their common religion, and the all-absorbing influence of climate, have effaced all hostile prejudices in the heart of the Italians; and what remains of their original differences can have no worse consequences than to excite a generous emulation, and conspire, by the multifariousness of their different resources, to the speediest promotion of their national resurrection. “Through various streams”—to make use of our bard’s fine comparison—

“Through various streams, from distant source,
Your mountain-torrents widely flow;
But lose their names, and blend their course,
Mix’d in the eddies of the Po.”*

* Berchet.

CHAPTER II.

POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND MORAL ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL ORDER.

Democracy and Aristocracy—Christianity—Popery—Catholicism—Convents—Reforms—Crusades and Chivalry.

IF enthusiasm of public spirit, and sanctity of private manners, were sufficient to secure for a nation an independent existence, Italy would have sent her glorious freedom down to the remotest generations. The wealth and splendour to which the enfranchised cities of the Lombard league were suddenly raised did not, for a long time, exercise their corruptive influence. The eternal state of warfare in which they found themselves engaged, from their earliest origin, was not peculiar to Italy—it was the element in which that age of steel equally breathed. But in Italy the field of battle was a gymnastic arena from which the republics seemed to derive new vigour and energy. It had the effect of preventing them from falling into that languor and torpor into which they would have been lulled by uninterrupted prosperity. Their spirit of enterprise, their emulous ambition, kept pace with those municipal jealousies, with those endless conflicts. Liberty, the worker of wonders, turned all poisonous seeds into sources of blessing.

But the Italian republics ran their race alone.

Liberty rose in Italy prematurely, or rather that country was doomed to run all the risks and chances of a first experiment. The higher the Lombards and Tuscans rose in their liberal aspirations, the deeper their neighbours sank into darkness and madness. The disorders of feudal anarchy still raged to their highest pitch on the other side

of the Alps. The Italians led the way to a land of promise, on which they were not to set their foot. They lit a torch that was afterwards to pass over to Switzerland, and thence to Holland and Germany, to England and America, and never, or but too late, warm their bosoms again. Italy was to assume the apostleship of civilisation and freedom, and, like all other apostles, to be requited with crucifixion and martyrdom.

Those free states rose amidst the confusion of unsettled institutions and jarring opinions. The Italians loved the name of liberty more than they comprehended its meaning. They hung in hesitation between the reminiscences of the ancient world and the wants of the modern. They contrived to reconcile the advantages of republican equality with the brilliancy of chivalrous prowess. They struggled to unite the worldly wisdom of Roman policy with the pure dictates of Christian humanity. Their governments partook of the military assemblies of the feudal Champ de Mars, and of the demagogic tumults of the Forum. Scarcely emancipated from the reign of violence, they had not well learned to give always right the ascendancy over strength.

The last germs of feudalism, which they flattered themselves they had uprooted, shot forth again, by a hundred ways, under the disguise of patrician aristocracy. The pomp and pageant in which the French and German courts were glittering still dazzled their fancy with fits of regret for departed royalty. The recital of the daring achievements of chivalry inflamed their minds with a martial fire that granted them no rest. The chivalrous spirit hovered over the ruins of the castles they had demolished ; it crept to their hearts, as if from the contact of the iron mails of the lords whose bloody spoils they had donned in the intoxication of victory. It spread an air of mad, quixotic bravery, that set the whole country

a waving of standards and throwing of gauntlets; espousing all quarrels for right or wrong; engaging in long unprofitable wars, to prepare with their blood the way to those evils from which, with their blood, they had only recovered.

In the first rage of republican effervescence, the feudal nobility, giving way before popular insurrection, had repaired to their strongholds in the recesses of the mountains, where their subjects did not care to persecute them; and they were, for a long time, left to the possession of their barren rocks, which they shared with the hawks and wolves of the Apennines; but, by degrees, as the citizens felt sure of their success, the nobles were allowed to share the rights of citizenship; and the two classes came thus to a reconciliation, of which the most generous and confiding was to be the victim.

The towns, which as long as they were animated by patriotic enthusiasm had, with their undisciplined bands, withstood the shock of the German cavalry, felt now, in their domestic feuds, the want of cavalry; the horse being, in the middle ages, the soul of battles. The noblemen, who had means and leisure for an exclusive devotion to military exercises, gave the republics their cavalry, and had soon the nerve of the state in their hands.

In times of peace the mob upon the squares checked all rising ambition by their watchful suspicion and summary justice; but at the first flourishing of the clarion of war, at the first ringing of the alarm bell, the nobleman mounted his steed, marshalled the disorderly multitude, led them to victory, and returned their idol. Thus gratitude for past services, or apprehension of impending dangers, gave aristocracy an influence which increased with the increasing frequency of war.

The noble families, when they abandoned their mountain abodes, transferred their castles into the cities.

Their mansions, generally placed near the gates, under the pretence of common protection, were allowed to have battlements and portcullis, and had the appearance, as they performed the service, of citadels. No sooner were the lords possessed with the power, than they abused it with that arrogance that is proper to aristocracy. The dissensions between the lower and higher orders were not less violent in the republics of the Middle Ages than they had been in either Athens or Rome. But they were of a shorter duration. In vain did the people rise, with repeated assaults, against that rapid usurpation. In vain did they join in fraternities of arts, and organise themselves under their popular leaders. In vain were the richest burghers formed into an aristocracy of wealth to counteract aristocracy of birth. In vain were all the misconstrued forms of consuls, tribunes, and senators, such as were confusedly preserved in their traditions of the Roman commonwealth, successively resorted to as a palladium of popular sovereignty. The nobility continued to gain ground, until the people, enlisted in its quarrels and factions, became the instrument of aristocratic ambition, and, by a deplorable reaction, undid the work of their fathers, and were led back to the evils of tyranny.

The nobility of these republics, however, as, indeed aristocracy in every free state, owed their primacy not merely to their superiority in arms, but also to their eminence in all public and private virtues. The class that aimed to rule contrived to acquire such qualities as might impose upon the mass of the people. In time of war, it was the fire of their steed and the glare of their sword; but at home it must be the power of eloquence and the wisdom of politics.

It is thus that, not only in the age of liberty but down to the following periods, we find the Italian nobility constantly aiming at excellence, not only in the highest pursuits of the government of the public weal, but in

science and letters, and even in arts, so that it may be fairly asserted that, with very few exceptions, all the great names in the records of Italian literature, especially such as united true elevation of character to the highest gifts of the mind, belonged to the highest classes; while, whenever genius descended to the inferior ranks of society, we have but too frequent reason to regret that the sacred spark had been wasted in the animation of unworthy clay.

The aristocracy of Italy is no more. Their patrician influence in republican times was crushed by the usurpations of national tyranny, their courtly importance under their national princes vanished in the general degradation of foreign invasions;—thus have those noblemen been the oppressors of the country in days of feudalism—the first of citizens in days of freedom—the minions of the courts in the age of oppression—and are now the first of slaves in the hour of bondage. The abolition of the right of primogeniture, and of the last feudal orders, has struck the death-blow upon the few families that were still lingering in pride and idleness under the shade of their former grandeur. Nowhere—as we shall have occasion to see—is now the noble class as a body more ruined, more degraded, more hopelessly discredited, than in Italy.

We do not know whether we have reason to rejoice, with the warmest patriots, at such a state of things; nor can it yet be proved whether France has reaped any real advantage from a similar work of demolition.

Italy seems to be eminently a republican country. Whenever her different people, by any happy circumstance, have been masters of themselves, they have never, if we except, perhaps, the case of the Sicilian Vespers, made choice of any but a popular government. All the reigning families in the country have erected their thrones in violence; none of them is of popular choice, none of

them but is derived from a race of foreign usurpers. No ruler in Italy has ever been defended with such beautiful examples of devotion as we read of in the histories of other countries. *God save the King*, and *Vive le Roi*, are shouts which find no echo in Italian hearts.

On the other hand, no republic is able to hinder true merit from shining, or people from valuing and rewarding it; nor can a man enjoy consideration and power without endeavouring to forward his descendants in the same career, nor can the people help looking with partiality and expectation towards the children of a man who has bequeathed to them his claims to public gratitude. Aristocracy is innate in society, it is inherent in our best feelings. The republic is wise which provides against its abuses, and prevents this system from becoming injurious to the common interests; the republic is wise that leaves aristocracy to public opinion without sanctioning it by law: but even this is, perhaps, more than human foresight can do; and, by refusing a feudal or a patrician nobility, you shall have, as in America, a new aristocracy every generation—the aristocracy of wealth.

The glorious career of Rome, Venice, and Genoa, on the one hand, and the fate of Milan and Florence on the other, the present prosperity of England, seem to advocate the importance of this system as the conservative principle of a free state, as the source of all that is really noble and disinterested in public life.

However, it is equally certain that nothing can be built on the wretched remains of the Italian nobility in our days, as if it had pleased Providence to level all differences, to destroy all privileges, all prejudices in that country, that nothing should oppose the reconstruction which it is now, perhaps, maturing in its inscrutable designs.

We advance these ideas with great diffidence, because we think that the discussion of political opinions has

already too long and too far injured the cause of Italy, by blending it with premature speculations and unnecessary controversies, which were better left to be calmly debated, when the great question of life and death—the cause of independence, on which all agree and which all equally understand—shall be happily decided.

It was precisely when the human families were most deeply involved in evil, when the shock of the barbaric invasions seemed mostly to threaten society with irremediable disorganisation, when the necessity of a pure, holy Mediator was most universally felt, that the Christian religion made its appearance in Western Europe.

From the earliest period of Christianity, Italy seemed to be designed to be its chief seat, its august metropolis. Harassed, dispersed by the Roman proconsuls in the remotest provinces of the empire, the fathers of the church always directed their efforts towards the capital, persuaded that to prevail at Rome was to prevail over the earth. Their virtues and the will of God triumphed. Rome was Christian, and the world was Christian.

At its first appearing in Italy, the gospel found everything wonderfully disposed for the fulfilment of the eternal will, a soil prepared for the reception of the holy seed. It found an enlightened but a degraded race, (the Latin population,) for whom the stern patriotic virtues imposed by paganism had become onerous and troublesome. It found another race, (the northern conquerors,) pure and virtuous, but rude and ignorant, willing to adopt the feelings and manners of their subjects, and desirous to conciliate them by listening to their moral and religious instructions. Hence, directed as it was by its Divine Promoter through natural ways, and assumed in great part from worldly motives, the gospel admirably succeeded in soothing the fierce spirit of the north, and in raising the degenerate race of the south. It interposed between man and his woes, struck down the raised arm of the violent, and dried the

tears of the sufferer; and, by raising man above earth, it poured a lenient balm on such wounds as could not be healed.

Christianity came not to avenge, not to redress, but to console; it promised not justice, not peace on earth, but retribution in heaven; it did not break the chains of the slave, but shared them with him. Unable to destroy feudalism, it created chivalry; to quench the thirst for battle, it invented processions and masses. To the victims of human injustice it laid open the asylum of the sanctuary; for the blasted hopes of youth, for the exposed honour of virgins, it prepared the silence of the cloisters; against the unlimited ambition of monarchs, it mustered the thunders of the Vatican.

A day had been, (it is an unwelcome thought, but one from which we cannot escape,) a day had been when, in ages of barbarism, of oppression and prejudice, every institution that had become connected with the Christian religion, even the most absurd doctrines and pernicious practices with which Catholicism had been charged, had their holy, their redeeming influence; when Popery and the monasteries alone preserved the social system from utter ruin. But no sooner had the Christian religion triumphed than the seeds of corruption burst forth.

The ministers of the gospel, styling themselves the vicars of Christ, began by undoing his work. They withdrew his books and counterfeited his words; then they made their opinion a law, and enforced that law by fire and sword. They intruded themselves into the secrets of the heart, and laid conscience asleep. They monopolised the eternal clemency, and set a price for the ransom of the soul, even beyond the limits of repentance: at last they sat in the Vatican, the rivals of kings in wealth, in power, in crime.

While a system of religious tyranny was thus gradually organised in the west, the eastern empire was raving with

a religious licentiousness, which became the principal source of its general dissolution. The liberal-minded sons of the Romans were revolted at the venom of Grecian controversies. Religious persecutions were, as we have seen, an occasion and a pretext for a political rebellion. All bonds with the eastern empire were broken, and the Italians clung to Rome, from which they perceived that new laws could still be dictated to the subjected world. Catholicism became for Italy a national property, a pledge of national union, an object of national pride. True, the Italians, as the rest of the world, and more than the rest of the world, suffered from the despotism and ambition of the court of Rome, and the simple manners of earlier ages were shocked at the scandals of which the eternal city was the theatre; but the importance that city and the whole peninsula derived from the circumstance of being the head of the church, of receiving the homage of monarchs, and welcoming the pilgrims from all corners of the globe—sitting, as it were, in the shade of the Vatican, protected by its thunders—by flattering the Italians in their natural love of greatness and thirst for dominion, inspired them with the idea that their cause and the cause of the church were one. In progress of time, when the great quarrel of national independence was fought against the house of Swabia by the Lombard league, the intimate alliance between the church and the people was still more closely soldered—an unnatural alliance into which the people entered with good faith for God and their inalienable rights, and the popes with schemes of ambition and revenge—an unfair play, in which the people paid with their blood and their money, the popes with indulgences and treasons; until, at the end of the contest, the pontiffs, now free from all fears on the part of Germany, conspired against the peace and liberty of those cities to which they were indebted for their very existence.

The reign of the pope seemed now at an end.

Up to the last conclave the popes had utterly estranged themselves from Italy. For a course of not less than seven hundred years, during the whole interval between Alexander III. and Gregory XVI., a long chain of vicissitudes and revolutions, a succession of illusions and delusions, of perfidies, and crimes, and atrocities, had shaken in Italian bosoms the fond persuasion that the Roman pontiff was their natural protector and ally, and that their destinies hung on the destinies of Rome. So great a subversion of all principles had, indeed, taken place, that the last successor of Alexander III., of him for whom the Lombard leaguers beheld with resignation the conflagration of their dwellings and the desolation of their families, was lately compelled to sue for existence, to implore the support of those German Cæsars whose anointed head his haughty predecessors were used to trample under their feet, and sell his influence, his dignity, his conscience, for a few Hungarian battalions, with whom to keep ground against the insurrections of his disaffected provinces. There is now a reaction in favour of Rome, which must, in its turn, become matter for our consideration.

But if local interests, veneration, and gratitude, bound the Italians to the natural enemy of the enemies of their independence—if, in the abstract, they loved and defended the papal chair, it was not seldom that they rose in arms against its unworthy occupants. Italy, during the Middle Ages the most enlightened of countries, could not be blind to the excesses which contaminated at every step the history of the church. Proximity or contact considerably tend to raise the veil before which men bow in adoration and awe; and those same excesses, which were heard with dismay and incredulity by the faithful of the far-off regions were laid bare to the view of Italy and Rome. The Romans, in consequence, have been in all times the most irreverent of Catholics. During all the period of the Middle Ages Rome was raging with anarchy; the popes were at the

mercy of the nobles or of the populace of that city, involved in their bloody feuds, raised up and cast down by the prevailing party, oftentimes made prisoners, insulted, and roughly handled, by their boldest chiefs; so that at last one of them, no longer safe in distracted Italy, asked for refuge in France, where the papal seat was transferred for seventy years to Avignon.

While patrician jealousy and popular factions often threatened the persons of the pontiffs even within the threshold of the sanctuary, men of genius aimed more decisive blows, especially against their temporal authority. As early as the middle of the twelfth century, at the very opening of the great national contest of the Lombard league, there appeared at Rome an inspired monk, Arnaldo da Brescia, one of the disciples of Abelard, and apostle of religious and political freedom, who, with equal zeal, daring, and eloquence, won the minds of the multitude; and though driven from Italy, by the hostilities of the popes and the council of Lateran, he ventured to the charge again and again, until he perished in the attempt*. In the like manner we shall have occasion to see what fierce enemies to Rome were Dante and his age, all that illustrious senate of poets and scholars who, more or less openly sympathising with all religious sects at variance with the church of Rome, such as the Albigenses of Languedoc, the Paterini of Lombardy, and the Templars of northern France, filling Italy and Europe with their indignant invectives, tended to raise the nations to a total emancipation from Catholic bondage.

We do not hesitate to affirm, that had Italian liberty proceeded in its course, reformatations would have taken place

* Arnold of Brescia, born towards A.D. 1105, a disciple of Abelard, in France.—At war, in Brescia, with the Bishops of the Diocese, 1134—1138. Banished to Switzerland, 1139. Summoned before the Council of Sens, in support of his master, Abelard, 1140. Arnold's arrival at Rome, 1146. Burnt alive by Adrian IV. and Frederic I., 1155.

two hundred years before Luther; but the genius of evil prevailed. Rome, strengthened in proportion as Italian independence gave way, and using her own advantage for a wanton retaliation, became in her turn the envenomed enemy of learning; and, while apparently protecting an idle classical literature, she destined to the flames books and authors, and murmured against Providence, who had made truth proof against fire and sword.

The age of papal despotism has now reached its close. The systematic attacks of the Reformation and the blasting ravages of the French revolution have demolished the last remnants of the edifice of the misplaced veneration of our forefathers. Fallen from the opinion of the firmest believers, the temporal power of Rome must now stand on a different basis. The pope must be a Reformer, or has ceased to exist.

Whatever, in the verification of the bright expectations of the warmest patriots, may prove the destiny of the court of Rome, it would be idle to apprehend that the adoption of a liberal policy on its part may lead to a dissolution of Catholic unity in Italy. Either owing to their natural tendency, or to the reflections arising from the past, such is at present the disposition of mind of that people, that they will sooner give up religion altogether than have it dismembered into different sects and communions. The unity of faith has always been a rallying standard to put an end to their discords and rivalries; the different orders and ranks of society have always met at church on terms of equality. Should it be otherwise, now that Italy can only live by concord and harmony?

That same calmness and soberness of judgment, that same abhorrence of cavil and sophistry, that same tolerance and liberality that deterred the Italians from plunging into the maze of Grecian heresies, has in later times equally prevented them from lending their ears to the best arguments of German Protestantism; and that spirit

of forbearance and temperance contributed to strengthen the bonds of religious unity in Italy far more than the bulls of the popes and the firebrands of the Inquisition, which, in many instances, both individuals and governments boldly and successfully resisted.

But wherever a free course has been allowed to theological investigations human minds have rushed on so inconsiderately, they have been parted so far asunder, that it would now require not less than the interference of the power of Heaven to bring them together anew ; and it is a fact, a striking, deplorable fact, that some of the Protestant denominations, by too busy a spirit of innovation, by too wide a freedom of discussion, and sometimes by the worldly jealousies and vanities of their ministers, have arrived at the same results to which the Catholics were driven by the errors and scandals of their church—scepticism and infidelity ; with this difference, that the Catholics have fallen into such extremes out of disgust and resentment—the Protestants have come to them through pride and presumption.

Catholicism, perhaps, even in its greatest purity, imposed more abnegation of reason, more implicit faith, than any effort of human virtue can assent to ; Protestantism gave to human curiosity and indiscretion more latitude than is compatible with religious submission. The fault in both cases chiefly consisted in the degree of authority left to the clergy. The Catholic is firmly persuaded that his priest would never wish to deceive him if he could ; the Protestant flatters himself that his minister could not if he would. Hence the Catholic depends too much upon another : the Protestant relies too much on himself. But deception in Catholicism must be derived from a general conspiracy of all the clerical orders, from the pope to the meanest of monks : error in Protestantism can be the consequence of the sophisms of a divinity-school, or of the shrewdness of a single preacher thirsting for notoriety.

Certainly, a thinking Catholic, assisting at the ceremony where a hundred thousand people are prostrated in adoration before the vial in which the blood of St. Januarius is boiling, has occasion to blush at the creed of his fathers ; but a warm-hearted Protestant, on his way to meeting, crossing a hundred currents of people walking in opposite directions, must feel a chill through his veins at the thought that all those people are treading in the path of error and perdition. The reformed denominations have always aimed to preserve religion in its simplicity and purity : the Catholics have laboured to maintain it in its splendour and majesty. The Protestants have kindled their persuasion in the light of reason : the Catholics have tempered their faith in the flames of charity. There is more in Protestantism to satisfy the mind : in Catholicism more to fill the heart.

As such considerations prevail in Italy among the most enlightened friends of religion, the unity of faith and worship will, according to all probabilities, be preserved in its forms, though under more large and liberal views. Prelates and cardinals, abbeys and nunneries, inquisition and censure, auricular confession, indulgences, and purgatory—all these are rapidly losing their influence for ever : but Catholicism, as a name, is still revered ; the most conscientious Christian in Italy has made his protest within the privacy of his heart, without being driven to an open profession of apostacy. Every man forms his sect by himself, and all those individual creeds meet in one church, as if for a tacit compact of mutual forbearance.

Together with the evil of pontifical usurpation, that of monastic seclusion ascends to the earliest periods of Christianity. Celibacy, one of the most fertile seeds of corruption of the Roman world, was fatally encouraged and reduced to system by the misconstruction of the Christian doctrines. A general belief was engendered that religion condemned all earthly affections and family ties as impedi-

ments to man in his flight to heaven ; and the deserts of the mountains, the bowels of the earth, resounded with the groans of a thousand victims, who thought they were pleasing God by abjuring his gifts—an unnatural enthusiasm and pernicious insanity !

But when those hermits abandoned the rocks of Thebais or the recesses of the catacombs—when their cell was changed into a palace, and that palace erected in the centre of the cities, or in their most luxurious environs—when the deathbed and public calamities began to supply the votaries of poverty—when all the noblest affections were quenched, that selfish egotism might triumph alone—when the confessional opened the way to the sanctuary of domestic privacy, and the vow of chastity was tried by a close familiarity with fair penitents—when the monastic bodies were ranked into a holy militia, to fight for the cause of ignorance, of popery, and the Inquisition—we are almost tempted to cry that their judgment has come too late, and the thunder has been suspended too long.

But it would be a patent injustice to look back on by-gone ages with the ideas of ours. The convents had their own day. It has been said, not without some foundation, that a great part of their vast possessions were the fruit of their industry, by which those lands had been redeemed from marshes and forests ; that they first disarmed northern ferocity, and used the respect and influence that the fame of their sanctity gave them over the hordes of the conquerors, for the protection of the helpless race of the conquered—that by their share in the temporal sovereignty they tempered the evils of feudalism, and hastened the abolition of servitude—that they first firmly protested against the superstitious practices of ordeals and judgments of God, and blunted the edge of the sword, which had so long been the sole arbiter of right and wrong in the courts of justice—that they preserved the treasures of ancient knowledge from utter dispersion in ages of darkness, and

fed the sacred lamp that was to enlighten the world—that they devoted themselves to the propagation of the gospel with a constancy and heroism that subsequent missions never could equal.

But, if the monks had their own day, it has set long since. The mission of the convents is accomplished: our gratitude has gone too far, and monkish pretensions still farther. There are other debts, and of more recent date, that we must be equally eager to discharge. The convents, as a system, must perish. The idle and pampered life of Franciscans—the loose morals and the tenebrous intrigues of Jesuits—the splendour and luxury of Benedictines—the bigotry and ferociousness of Dominicans—the vow of perpetual seclusion—the slow suicide of ascetic discipline—the fiendish arts by which inexperienced souls were walled up in a living tomb—have long been judged. It is not, we repeat, it is not the fault of Italy if there are still convents and popes. The last generation witnessed the sudden abolition of all those inveterate evils, and they have only returned with the re-establishment of that old-fashioned hateful state of things against which that unfortunate nation is struggling.

The recent example of Spain can show what awful retributions must be expected on the part of a people crushed under a yoke of ignorance and fanaticism beyond the limits of endurance; Spain, turning the fire and sword against those convents from which she had learned to burn and to slay, breaking open those prisons which she had filled with victims, and raving for that liberty of which she had crucified the first martyrs. The ways of the Lord are wonderful!

The day of awakening will have in Italy all the consequences of an earthquake. Happy if the work of destruction shall be confided to the hands of men not entirely dead to all feeling, who will not forget the real wants of the country in pursuance of wild schemes, and will not

hurt the sanctity of long-cherished opinions in the wantonness of success.

There exists in the old fabric of Catholicism an awful apparatus of enigma and magic, a veil of ceremonies and mysteries, under which the church of the Middle Ages endeavoured to enshrine the majesty of eternal Truth from the gaze of mortals—a veil which the dissenting denominations have not hesitated to tear asunder, but which still lies at the foundation of the belief of the Catholic, and exists in all its integrity, whenever any of the tenets of the revelation are preserved in his heart. True, it has been discarded by many of the high-spirited youth; but not, as among the Protestant sects, in consequence of a more wide interpretation of Scripture, or of the recasting of the theological dogmas. They threw off the yoke, because they were too proud to bear a yoke. They laughed at the mysteries, because they were repugnant to their understanding. They did not comment upon the Scriptures, but spurned them altogether. They arrived at and passed beyond the doctrines of Luther, but through the school of Voltaire. But as it is the firm belief of the great majority of the people that human reason is of no avail in religion, and as miracles and mysteries are not the dogmas that affect the basis of the morals of Christianity, it would be, at the best, rash and gratuitous to turn the attacks of the Reformation on that ground. The English and German missionaries in Italy have been unsuccessful, because they have rather too far insisted on that point. Apostles of Protestantism, and obeying the dictates of their consciences with more zeal than discernment, they have aimed their blows at a vital and sensitive part, rather than at the diseased and rotten; and their failure has been the more complete, inasmuch as the sound and righteous part of the Catholics apprehended in them ill-disguised apostles of the doctrines of error and impiety that ravage the land, while the corrupt and scoffing unbelievers scorned

them as narrow-minded casuists, trifling with nice distinctions and definitions, proceeding through by-paths and tergiversations, hesitatingly scratching at the bark of what, they trust, they have already mortally wounded at the core.

The greatest number of the ceremonies and solemnities of the Catholic religion had their origin in Italy. The Latin population, when giving the new religion a hospitable reception in their pagan temples, were unwilling to part with those rites and festivals which formed, from immemorial time, the dearest of popular amusements. Hence, with an ignorant, but guiltless mixture of holy doctrines and foolish practices, they systematised that monster of absurdity which the Protestants call Catholic idolatry. Many of those showy pageantries, in fact, could be traced back to the times of Roman, Grecian, and even Etruscan mythology. They have been handed down from generation to generation, without any regard to the changes of religious principles, as something that could be easily conciliated with all creeds, and accommodated to all worships; like some of those lofty cathedrals, that received by turns under their thousand columns the votaries of Pagan, Christian, and Mahometan faith; neutral, sceptic, unshaken, amidst the perpetual fluctuation of the opinions of men.

The foul fiends of error and fanaticism raved over desolate Europe. The history of the Middle Ages presents at every page the most melancholy pictures of the degradation of the human race. Religion had assumed all the blindness and ferociousness common to all passions in that age of blood. Apostles of terror and superstition arose in every land, with wild visions and legends of absurd miracles, with sudden alarms and consternations, to work men's minds up to the highest pitch of feverish excitement. Disorderly bands of hooded maniacs, under the different appellations of White Hoods and Flagellants, swept over

the land, like scourges of God, tracing their mad career with fagots and scaffolds. The dark satellites of the Inquisition awoke the terrified cities with the red glare of their ominous pyres, while under the shade of mystery, bound by the celebration of awful rites, secret sects and tribunals weighed the destiny of powerful lords, and the devoted victim fell under their daggers, within the stronghold of his inaccessible walls, among the joys of his hospitable feasts. In the midst of such scenes of horror it must be confessed that the multiplication of convents and nunneries, the rights of asylum granted to their sanctuaries, were hardly to be accounted as an evil; and the institution of processions and jubilees, the worship of relics and images, inasmuch as they afforded an easy gratification for that mixture of curiosity and bigotry which men mistook for religion, may be considered as a harmless diversion, as an instrument of gradual civilisation.

Sad that many of such institutions should be seen flourishing at an epoch so far remote from the Middle Ages! But let it not be forgotten that southern races are more under the control of imagination than reason; that more may be hoped by impressing their senses than by improving their judgment; that religion there is love, and, like love, it wants expansion, correspondence of warm feelings, movement, rapture, enthusiasm; that the periodical celebration of annual festivities tends to refresh a zeal which, in the daily routine of worldly occupations, is but too apt to relax; that the recurrence of universal penances and jubilees, by bringing nations into contact, contributes to rekindle in the human heart the torch of charity, which the collision of civil interests is ever extinguishing; that, in the universal attendance of a whole community to a single form of worship, the individual reads, as it were, the confirmation of his own belief, and feels as if Heaven could not refuse to smile on prayers sent up with such unanimity of hearts.

Certainly, when we see numberless crowds fall prostrate as if struck by lightning, at the first appearing of a priest holding up the holy host; when the strains of unearthly music issuing from an invisible choir, wind their lingering way through the echoes of the immortal dome of Michael Angelo; when, in the mute sweetness of an Italian sunset, the solemn peals of the Ave Maria come suddenly on the wings of the western breeze; even when in the stillness of midnight, in eastern climes, the voice of the Muezzin, deep, sonorous, oscillating, rings through the air, "waking the sons of Ishmael to prayer;" in that thrilling sensation which pervades our whole being, there arises a conviction that God is with all who lift up their hearts to him—that the smoke of our incense and the melody of our hymns can find their way to the foot of his throne, however much our mortal reason may be led into error as to the proper way of acknowledging him.

But when the ardour and brilliancy of western valour breathed a new life in the contemplative and ascetic virtues of eastern Christianity—when the red cross shone on the breastplate of the European warriors, and their lance was couched in a war that was called holy, and the church of Christ assumed the attitude, as it had the name, of the militant church—it gave rise to, or developed, or perhaps, only perfected, that spirit which the soothing influence of a religion of love strove to substitute for the violated empire of the law, and for the loosened discipline of social order—the spirit of chivalry.

Chivalry, that mixture of enthusiasm and extravagance that made the cause of the weak fair and sacred in the eyes of the brave—that noble school of loyalty and truth, of devotion and gallantry, of humanity and liberality—that sacred flame that tended to purify love from its earthly alloy, and raised an altar to woman—chivalry was the right arm of Christianity in its sacred mission of peace and justice. It was among the best miracles of a religion,

which, unable for a long period to disarm the ferocity of those warlike ages, pointed out to it a nobler end, and turned it by inscrutable ways into one of its most efficacious instruments.

Chivalry was the alliance of force with right.

It has long been fashionable, in more sober ages, to declaim against the pious folly that drove our forefathers by millions to find a premature death in the plains of Palestine. The long tale of consternation and woe that has been transmitted to posterity from the fatal success of the crusades, seems to have entitled us to doubt the righteousness of their cause, as well as the policy of the undertaking, as if it had not, like all human transactions, been predisposed and directed by that sovereign hand that is often pleased to derive from our very errors and follies the most salutary results.

The crusades brought a temporary peace to Europe. For the first time it united all Christendom into a single people.

It brought into communication all brotherly races, that climate, or ignorance, or rivalry kept asunder. It was a family meeting, in which ancient feuds were abjured or adjourned, and all animosities turned against a common enemy.

Pope Urban opened a wide field for ambition. The restless spirit of adventure, the thirst for combat, for worldly renown, for earthly dominion—avarice, emulation, curiosity—all the best and worst passions innate in the human bosom, conspired to the advancement of an expedition upon which the clergy invoked all the blessings of Heaven. Europe was gradually rid of some millions of her turbulent sons, who carried their aspiring hopes into a field where their wildest dreams seemed to fall short of reality.

That blind necessity of bleeding, which the human families obey nearly every quarter of a century, was, in

this occurrence at least, effected with the least consciousness of fratricide. The crusades were a folly indeed, but the Christians only recovered from it to plunge into the equally fatal but less pious follies of the wars of the Roses, of the Armagnacs and Burgundians, of the Huguenots and the League, of Cromwell and Napoleon. They ceased from their design of rescuing from profane hands the cradle of our Saviour and his tomb, but only to hunt down in his name the helpless tribes of America, or to forge chains for the innocent hordes of Africa. However severe the losses that Europe had to endure in her long struggles in Asia, we could not easily point out another epoch to which she may look back with less regret and remorse.

The crusades were the forerunners of the liberties of Europe. Rights and privileges were sold, charters granted at auction, to raise money for those venturous pilgrimages; slaves were manumitted; duties of vassalage, old debts, and tributes, legally abolished, or wilfully forgotten or settled by death. The magna charta of England and the parliaments of France date from that epoch of general convulsion.

But the best advantages were to be reaped by Italy.

Italian independence, already so far advanced, received its last sanction by the diversion of Palestine. The dispersed nobility abandoned the ill-disputed ground before prevailing democracy, and rode to the East to repair their losses, or to hide the shame of their discomfiture. The Cæsars of Germany were forced to take the cross, and Italy was rid of their presence. The horrors of civil war and the disorders of anarchy were more than once suspended or averted by the truce of the cross.

The Italians played a brilliant part in the wars of Palestine. The flower of the Milanese youth under the guidance of their warlike archbishop, and Tancred of Apulia at the head of his Normans, followed Godfrey of Bouillon to the conquest of Zion. Amalfi gave origin to the hospital and

military order of St. John of Jerusalem. Barbarossa and his grandson numbered many thousand Lombard freemen in their ranks, bound to their standards by Christian alliance. Pisa, Venice, and Genoa, furnished the best part of the naval armaments; the warriors from all countries of Europe rendezvoused in their ports. A hoary hero with unbroken spirits, the Doge Arrigo Dandolo of Venice, was seen borne in triumph on the shields of his warriors, over the battered walls of Constantinople, to share with the Marquis of Montferrat and a few French adventurers the ruins of an ancient empire. The Pisan and Genoese sailors were among the last to give way during the final siege of Acre, lavishing their blood from street to street, and from house to house, with raging heroism, when the angel of Asia prevailed, and the Christian star faded in the East.*

But in later times, when more worldly purposes were blended with the primitive aim of those holy expeditions, while French and German barons founded their ephemeral principalities of Edessa, Jerusalem, and Antioch, our republicans laid those bases of more solid settlements in their colonies and factories, that established in their hands the monopoly of commerce, and the sceptre of the seas.

The crusades led the way to India and America.

They roused a spirit of enterprise and curiosity that was never to rest while there should be space to run, and elements to subdue. It revealed the existence of boundless regions and inexhaustible treasures. It brought into contact the two opposite ends of the globe. It made man acquainted with the full extent of his appointed abode. The luxuries of the East were spread before the enraptured adventurers of Europe; the soil itself of the West teemed

* The first crusade, A.D. 1099. Taking of Constantinople by the Latins, 1204. Last siege and fall of Acre, and total loss of the Holy Land, 1291.

with the development of eastern seeds, and unknown harvests smiled on the Lombard and Neapolitan plains.

The human mind advanced with gigantic strides. The secrets of ancient Grecian lore followed the crusaders in their retreat, the light of Arabian science dawned on the night of the Middle Ages, and the dreams of eastern poetry dazzled the obtuse fancies of the North. The softness and languor of Asiatic luxury spread its soothing influence on the fierce spirits of the warriors of Europe. Their armour was loosened and dropped from their breast as if by magic spell, and their nerve was broken, like that of the knight in fairy tales, under a shower of roses. The refinement of manners induced a general taste for intellectual enjoyments, and mental power gradually assumed its ascendancy over bodily strength.

Such were the direct and immediate consequences of the crusades on the progress of European civilisation; but the indefinite impression they left on the minds of posterity had more lasting and more magical results. For, the human mind, when abating by degrees from its primitive energy, and sinking into more tame and homely pursuits, is apt to return with restless regret to the romance of past ages; and the good old times of the crusades, generally considered as the golden era of chivalry, haunted the imagination of all successive generations, the dearest theme of inspiration, the most heart-thrilling chord of the poet's harp.

The spirit of chivalry did not die off with the striking of the last Christian flag in Palestine, nor is it even in our days hopelessly lying by the side of the tombs of our ancestors, together with their helmets and corselets of steel. It was the same spirit that swelled with faith and enthusiasm the sails of those humble caravels, before which new worlds started into life from the bosom of the deep—the same that, independent of party spirit, and hallowing all causes by the same faith and sacrifice, shone in later

times among the warriors of Henry IV., or the cavaliers of Charles I. It was the same spirit that breathed its inspiration into the bosom of Gustavus Vasa, the same that sanctified the rights of Maria Theresa in the eyes of the Hungarian nobility. The martyrs of the reformation and the Jesuits of the earliest missions were warmed by the same flame; to the same spirit we owe the fairest names shining through the horrors of the French revolution—Bailly, La Roche Jacquelin, Madame Roland, and Charlotte Corday. It is the same that we have seen agonizing on the field of Warsaw, and at the foot of the scaffolds of Turin and Modena—the spirit of Devotion.

This spirit, we feel assured, is not dead. If its office was to fight until the reign of peace and justice should come—if its mission was to combat all violence, and redress all wrongs, Heaven knows that mission is not yet accomplished; and woe to us if the sword of chivalry were too soon definitively laid aside—woe to the warriors of Poland, and the martyrs of Italy—woe to all that is generous and pure, that is enthusiastic and liberal—to the flame of religion and the charity of patriotism—to the charms of poetry and the love of woman!

Thus the feudal and monarchic institutions, which the Gothic, Lombard, and Frankish conquerors had brought upon Italy, were early at war against the democratic and aristocratic orders of ancient Rome, which the popular element in the Italian republics endeavoured to revive. Christianity, which was providentially sent to conciliate all hostile principles, owing to the abuse of human perversity, became a new source of ambition and discord, of intolerance and oppression.

From such elements, however, even from the jarring and clashing of such opposite elements, the new social order was to proceed in Italy as well as in all the rest of Europe; and things were so providentially disposed, that neither could Roman policy and ancient learning have been with-

drawn from utter ruin, even by the new religion, without the material element of northern strength; nor could the brute force of the North have been softened even by Christianity, unless enlightened by contact with Roman refinement.

Thus, in the body politic that resulted from the chaos of the Middle Ages, Rome gave the intelligence, Germany furnished the arm, and the Christian religion formed the heart; and chivalry, the result of these three components, the representative of these three moral agents, was, under different disguises and appellations, the soul and mover of modern societies.

But we have outlived the work of the Middle Ages. The edifice of our forefathers, that composite of all orders of Roman, Gothic, and Eastern architecture, lay only a few years ago under our feet nearly a heap of ruins, and deluded nations exulted in the hope of its final demolition. The civil and sacred institutions of Europe were undergoing the slow and melancholy process of a lingering autumn; the last events of the French revolution were the north wind that was, at one blast, to hurry the work of desolation, and let in the horrors of winter.

But is then all the noble spirit of the Middle Ages equally prostrate and low? Is it so? is it desirable that it should be so? The strokes of hasty innovators have been incessantly aimed against that stately fabric of our forefathers. But their civil and religious institutions seem to partake of the solidity of their Gothic buildings, and to defy all the efforts of a restless posterity. In all their far-sighted conceptions they seemed constantly occupied with the future, all their works were intended for endless duration. A powerful reaction in favour of the Middle Ages has taken place at least in the North of Europe, ever since the first abating of revolutionary fury; but in Italy the imperious want of political existence, a general state of uneasiness and exasperation, is of necessity bringing the

noblest minds into an undiscerning hostility against the past. May the people of that country, if ever Providence call them to reconstitute their social order, experience how much more difficult it is to rebuild than to destroy; may they find in their patriotism a worthy substitute for chivalrous enthusiasm, in their Catholicism a basis for a more sound and enlightened Christianity!

CHAPTER III.

SOURCES AND ELEMENTS OF THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING.

Decline of Roman Literature—Influence of Italy over the Northern Invaders—Theodoric—Charlemagne—Universities—Law Schools—Bologna—Medical School of Salerno—History—Modern Languages—Italian Language and Dialects—Digression on the Arabians—Provençal Poetry—Chivalrous Romances—Earliest Italian Poetry.

WHETHER we may be bent on levelling to the ground the last remnants of the edifice of the Middle Ages, or whether we look upon them with religious wonder and reverence, the duty of well studying the institutions and well understanding the spirit of that era is equally incumbent upon us. The most rigid conservative no less than the most radical reformer must be equally acquainted with all the complex working of a system of which the one is willing to hold up even the most pernicious abuses, the other would demolish even the most salutary principles. To take a superficial view of the present state of society, without ascending to its remotest causes would unavoidably lead, as it but too often did, on the one side to obstinacy and superstition, on the other to rashness and presumption.

Now the history of that as well as of every other period is fully written, its very image is indelibly printed in its literary productions. Rude and barbarous as the literature of the Middle Ages may be said to be, it is still an original and genuine emanation; and the less it is indebted to the works of a more refined antiquity, for its external adornments, the more intimately and essentially does it belong to that time—the more eminently does it stand as its representative.

The history of literature in the Middle Ages must also have its beginning in Italy. The gifted climate of that country received the last faint glimmer of the lingering twilight of that long night of barbarism, and was greeted by the first beams of sunrise. The happy success of her long struggles for freedom had fitted her for her mission. The air of liberty fanned over the half-quenched embers of ancient lore, and raised them into a blaze that was to drive the phantoms of error from pole to pole. It will therefore be a subject of the highest importance to take a view of the state of literature in Italy, in that age of transition; to inquire by what means that country was enabled to take the lead in that work of regeneration; how far she contributed to the revival of the ancient classics; how much she was indebted to the living models of the Arabians and Provençals, and what claim Italian genius may have to originality.

We count the fading stars twinkling in the cloudy firmament of the Middle Ages, ere the glorious day dawn in which they will be dimmed and drowned in a torrent of light.

The writings of Greece and the writings of Rome form but one literature in two distinct languages. Literature in Rome, an idle luxury imported from Greece among the thousand articles of eastern corruption, with irreparable detriment to all that remained of national lore among the Etruscans and Oscians, never aimed at original conceptions. The Roman patricians sought in Grecian philosophy a refuge against the self-upbraiding consciousness of their own degradation; they sought in Grecian eloquence the ornament that might render their flattery more acceptable to the ears of their masters—a refined but aimless literature, such as could only become a tottering state and a society verging to its dissolution, never exercising any vital influence; never belonging, never appealing, to the feelings of the people, it could be expected to have only a precarious and ephemeral duration.

In fact, as soon as the gay and amiable parasites of the pampered Augustus were scared from court by the frowns of Tiberius, arts and letters were mute. A long and rapid decline ensued, interrupted only by the silver age of Trajan and his successors ; but by degrees even the power of copying had failed, and the remaining crowd of grammarians and rhetoricians sank lower and lower, until they had lost all taste and feeling, as their predecessors had forfeited all genius.

Whilst the literature of the Roman world was thus falling into ruin in consequence of its organic infirmity, the earliest fathers of the church hastened its downfall by their indiscriminate proscription of all Pagan authors, in whom they apprehended teachers of idolatry and immorality. Lifted to the most glowing inspirations by the visions of their ascetic life, drawing from the deep well of the Scriptures, strengthened and warmed by their endless controversies against the frequent attacks of heresy, those pious divines could have perhaps given rise to a new and more enthusiastic style of writing, if, instead of preserving the Latin language in its purity, they had not, by their rigid contempt of all literary ornaments, dried up the sources of life, and, by inflaming the blind zeal of bigoted monarchs, they had not declared an unrelenting war against the last remains of profane literature, with an ardour and diligence that left hardly any thing to be demolished by the barbarians themselves.

The reputation of these barbarians, of whom the monks of the Middle Ages had left us so horrid a picture, has been of late partly reintegrated by the sympathy of some of our contemporaries, who, by more liberal views and more accurate researches, have thrown new light upon that arduous subject.

The highest praises for moderation, for comparative refinement and culture, have been especially bestowed upon those among the northern invaders who first settled in

Italy—the Ostrogoths of Theodoric. The native ferocity of that nation had been considerably subdued by the softening influence of Christianity previous to their invasion. They lived under the compact of wise and equitable laws, they indulged in no wanton destructiveness, they felt all the importance of science and letters, and held their cultivators in veneration and honour. Theodoric, their leader and hero, a generous monarch, but, as it has been asserted, an illiterate barbarian, at the epoch of his arrival in Italy, called around his throne Cassiodorus, Boethius, and all such men as public report designated as the luminaries of the age.* His cruel treatment of Boethius indeed—of that noble genius whom the ancients and moderns equally claim as their own—could induce us to believe that, even after his long sojourn in Italy, the Northern monarch had not entirely laid down the last scales of his Gothic barbarism. Yet the gratitude of after generations points to him as one of the most liberal benefactors of mankind, endowed with a mind widely superior to his age. But it would be, perhaps, not very far from truth to state, that if the Goths ever displayed any taste for letters or arts, it was principally when they were brought into contact with the natives of Italy; and that even the style of architecture that bears their name, if it were indeed of Gothic origin—a point on which modern critics will not soon agree—never assumed its character of daring grandeur and majesty, until northern genius was roused to a noble emulation by the aspect of the lofty buildings of Rome.

The Lombards had the reputation of being a more barbarous race than their Gothic predecessors. Indeed the age of darkness has been dated in Italy from the epoch of the invasion of Alboin. Yet, as the host of that conqueror

* Cassiodorus born A.D. 497, died 575. Principal work, “*De rebus gestis Gothorum*.”—Boethius born at Rome, 455; Consul, 487. In favour with Odoacer and Theodoric. At war with the last for religious opinions. Imprisoned and beheaded, 526. “*De Consolatione Philosophiæ*.”

did not subdue the whole country, Italy must still have remained the repository of the ancient treasures of learning, and classic manuscripts continued to be sheltered under the shade of her cloisters. In progress of time, Authar having embraced the Catholic religion, and Lütprand tempered the Lombard statutes by the gradual adoption of the Roman laws, even the Lombards were allured by the charms of a long security to bestow their thoughts upon the cultivation of those arts of peace which they had spurned hitherto, and despised as a servile and unmanly occupation to be abandoned to the degenerate Latins.

Thus, at the epoch of the conquest of Charlemagne, the men that most virtually aided and directed the efforts of that monarch for the restoration of learning, such as Paul Warnefrid, Peter of Pisa, Theodulph, and others, were not only natives of Italy, but belonged to the race of the Lombard invaders.*

In the case of Charlemagne we have another illustration of that ancient saying, "*Victa terra victores domuit.*" It was always Italy subduing her conquerors. Like Theodoric, Charlemagne was little better than a rude and crafty warrior, when the pope laid open before him the road of the Alps. But the sight of the many monuments, the intercourse with Alcuin, an Englishman by birth, but whom he first met in Italy, and with the other illustrious Lombards we have mentioned, and finally the very air of Italy, inspired him with a desire of leaving of himself a nobler record than any of his most signal victories could have sent to posterity. All seminaries of learning, which were in a state of utter annihilation before him, received new life

* Paulus Warnefridus, or Paulus Diaconus, born in Friuli, towards the beginning of the eighth century, died A.D. 799. "*De rebus gestis Longobardorum,*" etc.—Theodulph invited to the court of Charlemagne, 781, created Bishop of Orleans. Accused of high treason, under Louis I Débonnaire, 818. Died in exile, 821.—Peter of Pisa flourished at Pavia, 774.

from his powerful will. If the universities of Paris and Bologna, and the medical school of Salerno, are not indebted to his patronage for their origin or increment, as it had been generally supposed, there is no doubt at least that the first start towards the universal diffusion of knowledge through the institution of public schools is principally due to him.

But the enterprise of rescuing Europe from barbarism was too far above the means of Charlemagne himself. All relapsed into utter confusion during the long wars of his successors, and ignorance laid its roots deeper and deeper down to the year 1000, which has been considered by many writers as the lowest extreme of degradation, the nadir of the human intelligence.

The schools established by Charlemagne, and those that were opened and flourished in great number under some of the Carlovingian princes, did not for a long period—not even after the beginning of the eleventh century, not indeed until the brightest era of the Italian republics—operate much towards the accomplishment of the redeeming mission for which they were instituted. The brightest geniuses that were called to preside over them launched into a bewildering waste, led astray by unprofitable chimeras, and were soon lost in a maze of error more tenebrous and deplorable by far than the utter ignorance they laboured to dissipate.

That mystic and polemic divinity which had brought all learning to a close at the epoch of the decline of ancient literature, after lurking faint and sickly among the cloisters, by the dim lamp of dreaming solitaries, had been recently revived in the schools, which had been especially opened for the benefit of the clergy; and, allied to the most abstruse methods of the scholastic philosophy of Aristotle, and of his Arabian commentators, gave rise to that confusion of wild theories and absurd hypotheses, of cavils and sophistry, of vicious interminable controversies, by which

that giddy age so wonderfully succeeded in wrapping up, and entangling, and eclipsing all truth.

Two orders of monks, drawn up in hostile array, headed by their *seraphic* and *angelical* doctors, cased in their panoply of "ipse dixit" authority, skilled in all the tricks and resources of dialectical subtlety, caused their Gothic halls and cathedrals to resound with the heavy thunders of their envenomed disputes. The gaping crowd stared and wondered, wrapt in stupendous amazement at the magic sound of the almost unknown language of the combatants, edified by the vehemence of their invectives and diatribes, and looking upon them with awe and perplexity, not unmixed with mistrust and contempt, until, their passions catching fire by the heat of the fray, they would occasionally enter as mediators in the contest, and by their summary justice settle all differences, enforcing orthodoxy by the irresistible arguments of fagot and stake. For the charge of heresy was the last weapon resorted to, to bring down a strong-headed antagonist, and it never failed to awaken the sympathy and the blood-thirsty enthusiasm of the people.

The hideous demons of superstition and fanaticism could not without a long struggle be driven off the field, of which they had for so many years held an undisputed possession.

Their ill-directed ardour not unfrequently interfered with the real progress of those scholars in the path of knowledge, their ambition for a universal scholarship, when the relations between the different sciences were more imperfectly defined, and the means of acquisition were less within reach, engaged them in a labyrinth of disorderly pursuits, where they were exhausted and lost before coming to any profitable results. Science was to them an unfathomable ocean, of which they vainly strove to sound the depths, while their only object should have been to sail across it

Every branch of learning was, in that early revival, involved in a dark veil of mystery; all its speculations were blended with the secret power of magic—acknowledged and obeyed the influence of supernatural agents. Astronomy strained every nerve to read the language of the stars, and boasted to unravel the arcana of the future before terrified mortals;—chemistry dazzled the eyes of the multitude by the juggleries of its infant discoveries, and dived deeply into the dark magistry of alchemy, of whose tantalising hopes and golden visions the juggler himself was the first dupe;—medicine dealt in aphorisms and amulets, and endeavoured to strengthen the speciousness of Grecian theory by the practice of Arabian quackery.

At every step, wherever we turn, a sense of pity and sadness steals over us as we muse on the long wandering of the human mind in past ages; and, far from finding courage to laugh at the absurdities of those holy divines, of those famous empirics, or at the extravagances of the title-pages of their huge folios—all we find leisure to read of their works—we bend our brows with despondency, and feel tempted to doubt whether indeed we are treading on a surer path, whether posterity will not equally laugh at our pursuits, and whether we are to be thankful to Heaven for the gift of this ever-straying reason of ours.

Italy was the first to recover from that universal aberration of the human mind, or rather never plunged into it so deeply as the Transalpine nations had done. Italian scholars were, indeed, called in all times to the direction of the theological schools of England and France; and few divines were ever raised into a greater renown than either Thomas Aquinas, or Lanfranc and Anselm, the founders of the School du Bec, in Normandy, who were called by William the Conqueror and his successors to fill the see of Canterbury, and played so conspicuous a part in the contests between the English monarchs and the pontiffs of Rome. The school of Normandy flourished under the au-

spices of those prelates long before the attention of all Europe was attracted by the superior genius, by the bold mind, and wild, disorderly career of Abelard, and Peter Lombard, his disciple, the two great luminaries of the University of Paris. But no school was opened in Italy for that polemic theology and scholastic philosophy in which that age so universally delighted; and those among the Italians who aspired to shine in that sphere were obliged to repair to France and England, the fields where those erudite conflicts were fought*.

Whether or not the University of Paris was first founded and chartered by Charlemagne, and that of Oxford can date its primordial institution from Alfred, we shall not venture to dispute; but it seems doubtless that some of the Italian schools, notwithstanding long and frequent interruptions, were never considered as definitively closed during all the stormy period of the Middle Ages; and some of them, Bologna and Salerno especially, can boast of the remotest antiquity. Nor—even if the Italian universities were to yield the vaunt of priority of time—would ever the topics treated of in the French and English seminaries have had any influence upon the progress of society, if the law-schools of the Lombard and Tuscan republics had not turned men's minds on subjects of more vital importance, and extended the influence of learning upon the body politic of the state.

Bologna, the noblest and oldest of those institutions, from immemorial time the mother of learning, had been

* Thomas Aquinas, the greatest of Italian divines in the Middle Ages, called the angelical doctor, born in Aquino, A.D. 1224; created D.D. at Paris, 1255; died, 1274; canonized by John XXII.; first edition of his works, Venice, 1490.—Lanfranc, born at Pavia, 1005; studied at Bologna; retired to the Abbey of Bec, 1041; founded a school of divinity, 1044; elected Archbishop of Canterbury, 1070; died, 1089.—Anselm, born at Aosta, 1033; pupil and successor of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1093; banished, 1097; recalled, 1100; died, 1109.—Peter Lombard, born at Novara; Bishop of Paris, 1160; died, 1164.

improved and augmented by the cooperating munificence of all emperors and popes. That city had seen the day in which ten, and even thirteen thousand students crowded her halls—when the most profound scholars from seventeen districts of Italy and eighteen different nations of Europe walked beneath her porticoes—when the degrees and insignia of doctors, of bachelors, and other academical titles and ceremonies, were first introduced, to be successively adopted by all the modern universities. It was there that Werner, or Irnerius, a native of that city, a man of wide-spread reputation, and of the loftiest character, honoured and favoured by Henry V. of Germany, and by the high-spirited Countess Matilda, towards the beginning of the twelfth century, opened the first law-school, and began to read and expound the Pandects of Justinian, which had fallen into disuse, or had been utterly lost, according to an ancient report, and were rescued from oblivion by the Pisans at the epoch of the taking of Amalfi. Law-schools were soon opened throughout all Lombardy and Tuscany*.

The study of law, so consistent with the ardour of these new republicans, for the better understanding and defining of their civil and political rights and duties, soon absorbed all capacities. The Transalpine nations followed the example of Italy. There were soon law-schools throughout Europe, modelled after that of Bologna; and the study of the Lombard and Tuscan municipal constitutions gradually roused the European communities to break the bonds of feudalism†.

Meanwhile the diffusion of legal studies in Italy altered the whole face of society. All magistrates were, from that time, principally furnished by the universities, as they had

* Irnerius born at Bologna; professor of law in that university, A.D. 1128; died, 1150.

† Vacarius, a Lombard by birth and disciple of Irnerius, the first teacher of law in England; flourished, A.D. 1160.

been previously chosen from the army. Men of learning sat at the helm of public affairs at home, and were intrusted with the most difficult missions abroad. Venice, Pisa, and Genoa gave out their "Consolato del Mare," the first model of a maritime code, limiting the rights of nations at sea. From that time the Italians laid the first basis of European diplomacy.

Thus, when the great national contest had been fought on the field of Legnano, and the cities of the Lombard league sent their legates to treat as equals with Frederic Barbarossa for the peace of Constance, it was with a start of indefinable emotion that the world beheld a few dark-eyed, long-robed, Italian doctors, the disciples of Irnerius, advancing with a calm, secure countenance, among the iron-clad barons of the German court, as if announcing that the iron age was over, and arms were henceforth destined to give way before the gown.

Meanwhile, in the south, the medical school of Salerno, whose origin is lost among the remotest traditions of age, had been, towards the year 1060, reorganised by the arduous cares of Constantine Africanus, and raised to its highest splendour and dignity. This extraordinary man, a native of Carthage, a type of the most remarkable scholars of the Middle Ages, had travelled thirty-nine years to Egypt, to India, to Persia, to the remotest provinces of the known world, in pursuit of knowledge, and, according to the encyclopædical comprehensiveness of the studies of that epoch, had embraced, with one vast intelligence, all that could and could not be known; could read and write all dead and living languages; had conversed and discussed with the highest standing literary characters of the East and West, and beaten them at their own weapons in private and public debates; had searched, collected, and translated all the most precious treasures of Greek, Chaldean, and Arabic lore; and after having been tossed about from land to land, and persecuted and banished as heretic and

sorcerer, he found a shelter from envy and ignorance at the court of the Normans of Apulia, under whose patronage he resided in Salerno; until, deeming even that school an unsafe harbour against the tempests of life, he retired to the monastery of Monte-Cassino, where he never lost sight of his favourite pursuits to the very close of his days.

Such were the Italian universities of the Middle Ages, which, arising, for the most part, from the elements of national liberty, were destined to struggle against all the following vicissitudes of the country, and continued, long after the abolition of democracy, to present the strange anomaly of a republican institution flourishing under monarchical states.

The final day seemed now to have come for them also.

The Italian universities, venerable from their primogenial antiquity, relying on their indisputable claims to the gratitude of mankind, after having contrived to thrive under the suspicious jealousy of domestic despotism, after withstanding the wanton attacks of foreign oppressors, baffling and unveiling the wily arts of Jesuitism, and breaking asunder the fetters of the Inquisition, had been spared through so long a course of generations, only to be now involved in the great national contest, to which all that belongs to the past was rapidly falling a prey.

The final day had at last come for the Italian universities; their august halls and vestibules, haunted by silence and loneliness, reared up in the most sequestered quarters of old, solemn, dilapidated towns, such as Pavia, Padua, and Pisa, could not escape the watchfulness of the Italian rulers in the merciless war that they have miserably waged against thought. Suspected as the nurseries of rebellion, impeached of materialism, of Romanticism, and, what is worse, Carbonarism; divided and fettered, as those of Padua and Parma, or given up to the rage of the Jesuits, as those of Naples and Modena; or utterly suppressed as those of Turin and Genoa; their professors, Libri, Melloni,

Nobili, Orioli, and a hundred of the most eminent sent into exile, to become the pride and ornament of foreign universities; those Italian seminaries had too long been at the mercy of enemies who seemed to cherish in their heart the fond hope of driving back the spirit of the age, by hushing the tongue of the schoolmaster, or pulling down the walls of the school-house.

While the law-schools of the Lombard and Tuscan republics, by turning the lucubrations of the learned towards objects of public usefulness, kindled a new ardour for study, and placed it within reach of the multitude, whilst the commerce of the maritime cities with the eastern empire and the Moors of Spain laid open before the enterprising curiosity of Italian scholars the sanctuaries of Greek and Arabic science; and men of profound erudition, especially from Lombardy, set out on long pilgrimages in quest of parchments and manuscripts; Venice and Genoa, as early as the beginning of the twelfth century, and subsequently every free community, began to intrust their most conspicuous citizens and magistrates with the compilation of national memorials; and history, thus taken from the silence and barrenness of the convents, emancipated from the superstitions and absurdities of monkish legends and chronicles, began to exercise its functions as treasurer of the past, and monitor of the future; and if we remember that those enlightened democracies made the first attempts towards establishing systems of general policy and diplomacy, and their hardy navigators brought home information from the remotest regions, we shall no longer be at a loss to understand why the annals preserved in the archives of the Italian cities have at all times been revered as universal records of undisputed authenticity.

All these noble efforts, however, would have failed to bring about any general result, without a great revolution, that had been matured long before Europe had given any symptom of a revival of learning: we mean the extinction

of the Latin, and the rise of the modern languages. The Latin of the schools, always coarse and uncouth as it was, on account of the utter disregard of the scholars of the Middle Ages for all ornaments of style, and of the prejudices still extant against the profane authors of classic Latinity, was no longer the language of the people, and could, therefore, no longer serve as a direct organ of communication between the learned and the active part of society—between the school and the state.

From the earliest contact of the northern nations with the natives of the Roman dominions, the Latin language, which had, perhaps, never been pure, even in Italy, especially in Cisalpine Gaul, underwent a rapid and progressive corruption. This popular dialect, which had for a long time insensibly diverged from the standard language of Rome, was finally recognised as a new dialect, and distinguished under the name of “Romance” language, which was equally spoken in all the formerly Roman provinces of Italy, Gaul, and Spain, and became the common source of the modern languages of the south of Europe. This Romance language arose simultaneously and from the same circumstance in all the above-mentioned provinces, and was for a long time spoken and understood as one and the same language; but the local peculiarities which it derived from its primitive sources, in progress of time traced the limits of different and distinct dialects, and the new languages of Languedoc and Languedoil, or of Provence and Northern France, as well as those of Spain and Italy, arose.

The Italian language appears to have been formed, or rather, perhaps, to have been written, later than any of the southern tongues of Europe; not, indeed, because the corruption of the Latin may have taken place any later, for the formation of the Romance language in northern Italy must have occurred during the long period of the Lombard dominion; but because the Latin lingered with

more fondness in the land where it had sprung, where it found a more lasting abode in the convents, in the schools, in the liturgy of a church which had its chief seat in Italy.

The Italian languished for a long period of ages, a formless and and lawless dialect, more and more spurned and neglected, as an impure bastard, by the scholars of the Middle Ages, in proportion as the revival of learning naturally led them back to the dead languages; but when the want of a literature of life called the living tongues into action, when the first examples of Romance poetry were set by the Provençal Troubadours, the Italian was found to have been silently matured by the secret working of the people, and, hiding its infancy amid the darkness of ages, it seemed to arise full-grown and armed, like Minerva, from the head of its great father, Dante.

The late appearance of a standard language in Italy, and the long neglect in which the vernacular dialect was suffered to lie from its earliest origin, gave rise, perhaps, to that endless variety of vulgar idioms which strike the stranger at every step in his progress through the country.

Those peculiarities proceeded from the original varieties of language of the many Teutonic tribes that settled in the different districts, and were afterwards preserved and cherished with all the warmth of municipal jealousies, when, by the wars of the republics, all alliance and friendly intercourse between the hostile cities had come to an end. It cannot be doubted, at least, that, even in our days, the popular language exhibits more of the natural softness and melody of the mother tongue at Rome, at Venice, in the south of Tuscany, and wherever the native race escaped foreign mixture to any considerable degree; while the dialects of the Vale of the Po, in Lombardy, Piedmont, and Romagna, betray their barbaric descent by their harshness and rudeness, no less than by their strength and

conciseness, by their sharp nasal Gallic accent, by their Gothic clash of diphthongs and consonants ; and while the mixture of Greek and Saracen are still to be recognised in the lively and argute dialects of the Calabrias, and in the deep guttural accent of the islanders.

The abuse of the vulgar dialects has ever been, and will be for a long time in Italy, one of the most serious obstacles against the diffusion of national education. Not only are those patois absolutely unintelligible out of the narrow limits in which they are spoken, but even Italian itself is not generally well understood among the uneducated people, so that the lowest classes in Italy have no common means of communication.

The guilty neglect of the national language, in private and public schools, and the deplorable infatuation for preserving those provincial idioms, with all the narrow-mindedness of municipal prejudices, render it difficult even for the highest circles to converse fluently and correctly in that sweet language that forms the delight and admiration of foreigners ; and it is not unfrequent to find men of the loftiest genius, who unconsciously minister to the blind predilections of the people, by consigning the sublime inspirations of poetry to the medium of those vernacular tongues, which, if they understood the true interests of their country, they would join to exterminate.

The historians of the progress of the human mind in the Middle Ages are at a loss to determine by what slow process the Romance dialects of Southern Europe were, by the influence of a general refinement of manners, gradually dressed in all the charms of poetry, and the ever-varying idioms of the people were finally forced to recognise the sovereign sway of a standard literature.

Following especially the path traced by Ginguené and Sismondi, though we are aware that the great majority of English and German critics have altogether rejected their

theories, we shall assign to Arabian influence the merit of having given the first start to modern literature in Spain, France, and Italy.

As soon as, led by the enthusiasm of the successors of the Prophet, those wonderful rovers of the desert, "having"—to adopt their own oriental style—"taken the four opposite directions of the wind, spread over the earth with a valour of which the report alone secured success, having routed more enemies than they could count, and subdued more land than they could travel through," they turned their minds to the arts of peace with the same restless alacrity which had guided them in their warlike exploits.

Arrived in contact with the Greeks in their conquest of Egypt, they wrenched from them the torch of learning which fluttered languidly in their hands, and, under the mighty patronage of the great monarchs of the house of Abbas, especially Haroon-el-Rasheed and his august successor, they proceeded to the diffusion of literary institutions of all kinds, with an ardour and diligence which has never, before or after, been equalled.

How far modern science is indebted to them for their discoveries in medicine, in astronomy, in all philosophical studies, for their improvements in the science of navigation, in all the useful arts of war and peace, we need not to enumerate. The light of science and letters, which they had first kindled in the East, followed them over the whole of their vast conquests; and their schools and libraries were especially numerous and copious in Spain, where, under the immediate favour of the dynasty of the Ommyades, the Moslem races reached, perhaps, the highest point of moral and intellectual attainment.

It is worthy of remark, that Sicily did not obtain from the Saracenic invasion all the advantages in respect to literary institutions that were derived by Spain from the Moors. The Saracens of Sicily found no rest in their adopted home. Their continual piratical excursions al-

lowed them no leisure for study. Still the medical school at Salerno would never have risen to so eminent a rank without the direction of African and Arabian scholars; and we may be permitted to believe that the Saracens, who were spared in the Norman conquest, and flourished at the court of Frederic the Second and Manfred his son, considerably added to the renown that Sicily enjoyed in the infancy of Italian literature.

But while the basis of their philosophical studies lay principally in the works of the Greeks, whose manuscripts they collected and translated with unwearied attention, their poetry possessed all the vivid colours of its oriental descent. From immemorial time these wandering tribes possessed a native poetry, shining with the brilliancy, fragrant with all the perfumes of the landscapes of Yemen. Poetry and religion had, among these people, been always closely connected, and the creations of their poets were hung around their temples, as if in consecration to the divinity from which they emanated. Eastern imagination looked with indifference to the pure and sober inspirations of the Greeks. They had no translations or imitations of any of the classic poets of the language of Homer. Hence their style was entirely their own. That delicacy of sentiment, that tendency to luxuriance and extravagance, that mysticism and transcendentalism, which characterises those writings in modern literature that are known under the name of romantic, and for which we find no models among the writings of Greece or Rome, seem certainly to proceed from the influence of Arabian and Persian poetry. The rhyme, and, to a great extent, the rhythm and measure of Provençal, French, and Italian verses, and the forms of sonnets, of songs, and other metrical compositions, have been by many writers, though not without strong opposition, considered as evident proofs of their eastern derivation.

But our opinion would, perhaps, meet with more uni-

versal suffrages, if we should state that, if not the style and model, the spirit of poetry at least was communicated to the west of Europe by the Arabians.

Towards the middle of the eleventh century, the Moorish dominion in Spain gave signs of imminent dissolution. The dissensions of the petty sovereigns who succeeded the wise dynasty of the Ommyades, and their persecutions against the few Christians who had hitherto continued unmolested among them, drove to the Christian courts of Catalonia and Aragon a number of illustrious exiles, who carried with them the sciences and arts, the tales and poems of the East.

We have reason to believe that those Catalonian and Aragonese monarchies were then amongst the most refined in Christendom. By the union of Catalonia and Provence, in the year 1092, the glory of a superior cultivation passed from Spain to the court of Provence. That court enjoyed, in that epoch, the blessings of a long peace, during which it became the mirror of the chivalry of Europe. All that France had most fair and gallant repaired to the tournaments and courts of love, with which the guests of those liberal princes were continually entertained.

It was there that the poetry of the Troubadours arose. William, Duke of Guienne, the first bard mentioned in the history of the gay science, flourished about the year 1096. But the golden age of Provençal poetry only began towards the middle of the twelfth century, and lasted till about the close of the thirteenth.

More lately, the long wars of Castile against the Moors of Spain, the Crusades, the acquisition of a part of Languedoc by the English, and such other political commotions, tended to associate the knights of all Europe in common adventures. Thus the poetry of the Troubadours became the common inheritance of all Christendom, and the Provençal was soon the common language of chivalry, love, and gallantry.

The differences of the romance dialects being not yet clearly defined, the earliest Spanish poetry may be considered to have been soon melted into the Provençal, and this to have spread throughout all the courts of Europe. The professors of the gay science were greeted and honoured wherever they passed, and the high credit to which they rose induced knights and ladies of the highest standing to join their ranks. Some talent for poetry was considered as the most brilliant appendage of chivalrous valour. Frederic Barbarossa, and Richard of England, the lords of Poitou, of Orange, of Auvergne, and Montferrat—and in later times, Alphonso II. and Peter III. of Aragon,—aspired to the title of Troubadours in the halls of their castles, as they sighed after the glory of private knights in the field. The ladies entered the lists of the melodious *tensons* of their bards, and learned to answer in verses the metrical effusions which their charms had inspired.

Social and private life seemed animated with the air of song; romance of life closely followed the romance of poetry. A spirit of wanton gallantry had relaxed all bonds of morality. False ideas of honour, of loyalty, and devotion, seemed to sanction the most transcendant absurdities. It was a blessed age of roving and pilgrimages, of wooing and worshipping, of dancing and skirmishing, of sinning and confessing. A stripling of a page, a varlet, but ennobled by his proficiency in the gay science, dared to aspire, and not unsuccessfully, to the smiles of a princess, who sat successively on the thrones of England and France; another raved all his lifetime after dreams of grandeur and majesty, fancying himself at the eve of exchanging his poetical laurel for the prouder decoration of an imperial diadem.

The extremes of tragic and comic, of sublime and ludicrous, never were brought into a closer contact. It was now a king, prisoner in a dark tower, and a faithful minstrel travelling in quest of him, across mountains and

along rivers, and the sound of his harp reaching the ears of the monarch like a ray of hope beaming through the darkness of his lonely confinement. Now, a love-sick king's son drooping with a hopeless passion for an eastern princess, whose dark blue eyes he had never beheld, starting at last for Palestine, preceded by a hundred sonnets, borne on the wings of the zephyrs, and arriving only to die at the feet of his mistress in a trance of joy at the sight of her charms. Now, a dying palmer, despatching his shield-bearer from Syria, charged with the awful mission of conveying his heart to the lady of his thoughts; and the trusty messenger roaming about the forbidden abode of the fair one, surprised and stabbed by the watchful jealousy of a villanous husband, and the precious relics of the crusader dressed in an awful mess, and eaten at supper by the unconscious lady.

Such were the ideal images of chivalrous poetry, such the real incidents of chivalrous life. But, as in process of time the poetry of the Troubadours passed from its original birth-place of Provence to the courts of the north and south, it began to appear dressed in all the different languages, and modified by the different tastes of the various nations to which it emigrated.

There had been in the north, since the epoch of the earliest invasions, among the Gothic and Scandinavian tribes, a national poetry, the last traditions of which were not yet utterly forgotten. The efforts of the modern Germans to revive the ancient poetry of their forefathers have brought into public notice large fragments of poems, the origin of some of which, according to the statement of their most sanguine critics, ascends as far back as the days of Theodoric and Attila. But, without taking upon ourselves to adopt or to reject the antiquity of the *Nibelungen Lied* and the *Helden-Buch*, it would have been easy to conjecture that those warlike tribes could not have been led from one end to the other of the continent

without the excitement of heart-cheering songs, and that poetry and romance there must certainly have been in the entrancing joy of triumph with which they hailed a new land as the appanage of their children; in those long rows of tents and chariots that carried their wives after them, to make their hearts beat with redoubled anxiety in the hour of danger. The sweet clime of the south, however, and the enjoyment of domestic habits, soon buried those songs in oblivion in France and Italy; and the warlike verses of the German tribes died away with the sounds of their trumpets and the neighing of their steeds, when the conquest was secured, and the warrior reposed under the shade of his laurels.

But among the Scandinavian pirates, who under the names of Danes and Normans infested the coasts of England and France, and ended by possessing themselves of part of both countries, the traditions of their national poetry must have been preserved for a period of longer duration, and their poetical taste must have been communicated to the provinces of Northern France, with whose romance dialects the native tongue of the Norman conquerors was soon blended. The daring adventurers that followed William I. to the conquest of England had not at least lost sight of the minstrelsy of their ancestors, if we are to believe that their spirits were wound up to the highest combative mood by the harp of Taillefer, singing the deeds of the brave Roland on the eve of the grand strife that submitted this fair island to the valour of their lances.

Nevertheless, whatever might have been the poetry and the language of these Northmen, long after their first settlement in Normandy; whatever we may believe of the assertion that the Romance Walloon of Northern France was written in verse, and formed a distinct dialect, long before the first crusade; and that, for instance, the sweet strains by which the high-souled Héloïse was won,

and her name raised to its romantic celebrity, were dictated in that language; it may perhaps be easily ascertained that the poetry of the Troubadours, and in consequence the Provençal language, were still cultivated in the North of France and in England in the days of Philip Augustus and Richard Cœur-de-Lion; so that those chivalrous romances, that are thought to have originated in Normandy or Brittany, and which are especially known under the name of Poetry of the Trouvères, must be considered to have arisen, or at least to have flourished, in an epoch posterior to the golden age of Provençal poetry, and to have therefore received from it that warmth and animation which they could not have derived from their German and Scandinavian origin.

Those chivalrous tales, in fact, from the earliest specimens of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, down to the livelier Spanish conceptions of the Amadis, and the French legends of the Paladins of Charlemagne, seemed to gain new charm and interest in proportion as they basked in the rays of a southern sun; so that, in the same measure as they belong to a more modern epoch, they lose more and more of their affinity to the heroic poems of the Gothic and Scandinavian races, to whose remote derivation they are generally traced.

The influence of Arabian taste had tinged them with more lively hues; and while the type, the frame of those romances, was essentially of northern cast, the spirit which animated them was evidently of eastern emanation. Those ancient German epopées described other manners and other feelings. The German bards were impressed with the gloom of their sky, with the dreariness of their northern wastes; their fancies were saddened by the awful rites of their religion, by the truculent traditions of their mythology. The austerity of their morals excluded all effusions of love and gallantry: woman was revered with devotion and deference, but not with the ardent

transport of chivalrous passion. Chivalry, by its origin a German institution, was not, however, perfected until the days of the crusades, when northern valour was allied to the brilliant enthusiasm, to the splendour and courtesy, of eastern refinement.

The wars of Spain and Palestine extended the field of chivalrous adventures. The unexplored regions of the East lay open before the boldness of European enterprise, and the dreams of the poet peopled them with phantoms and monsters, which, however, fell short of human credulity. Christian princes were made to ride to India and China, and turbaned heroes to roam through the forests of England and Germany. Love, glowing with all the fire that consumes southern and eastern bosoms, usurped the highest place in chivalrous life. Fays and enchantresses, no longer the mischievous weird hags of the North, but kind and benevolent beings, after the stamp of eastern genii, inhabitants of golden palaces and enchanted gardens, gifted with immortal beauty and happiness, with no other spell than the charms of their loveliness, welcomed the weary knight, and nestled him in their bosoms, enraptured, bewildered by long draughts of blessed forgetfulness.

It would be hardly possible to doubt that such poetry must early have made its way into Italy. The long residence of the Saracens in Sicily, the commerce that the Italian republics entertained with the Moors, and with the Christian monarchies of Spain, the share they had, in all times, in the warlike and maritime expeditions to Palestine, must have rendered the Arabian, French, and Provençal poetry familiar in Italy. If Lombardy and Tuscany had few or no courts or castles to which the strolling minstrel could repair for hospitality, his performances were not utterly lost upon the people. The songs and ballads in the Provençal and French languages were not probably unintelligible to Italian ears; and it is most

likely there must have been no lack of early attempts at a rude national minstrelsy in the popular dialects.

Unfortunately, in Italy, from the earliest revival of literature, a wide barrier was raised between the learned classes and the people. The Italian scholars erected themselves into a privileged order, and usurped the place of that aristocracy which the republican spirit of the times had demolished. Hence all that originated with the people was left to perish among the people; and while the Italian doctors and scholars, all buried in their classical studies, were scarcely aware that any other language could be spoken but the barbarous Latin of the schools, the earliest specimens of vulgar poetry must have been indiscriminately suffered to wallow disfigured and corrupted among the illiterate multitude, sung by ragged jongleurs and mountebanks, handed down from generation to generation, until they received new life in the archetypal creations of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Ariosto.

But when at length Italy was, by the sound of the harp of the Troubadours, awakened from the deep studies in which she was engulfed; when she began to feel that Latin could no longer be the language of life, and that her rude new dialects could answer the noblest conceptions of the mind, as well as the softest emotions of the heart; when she first came to the bitter conclusion that she had taken the wrong way, and had suffered herself to be outrun by her neighbours, she threw aside for one moment her Justinian and Augustin, and, grasping her lyre that had hung mute by her neck for ten centuries, she rushed into the lists with anxious emulation, and soon assumed her wonted place as ruler and mistress; for the generous matron felt that she was destined to lead the way; and the idea of being left behind in the race of nations is one to which, even now, after such a long schooling of humiliation and vassalage, after the luminous

evidences of French, English, and German superiority, she can hardly be reconciled.

The earliest specimens of Italian poetry now in existence belonged to the dispersed aristocracy; and the first attempts appear to have been made in the only court that was left still standing in that republican land; as such, they were only the echo of the melodies of chivalrous France. The first verses were even written in Provençal, and the name of the heroic Sordello of Mantua, with a few other bards from Venice and Genoa, rank among the highest in the list of Provençal troubadours*. But, the first example being finally set by the court of Sicily, Italian poetry arose early in the thirteenth century.

It is not our purpose to give any account of the Italian poets that preceded the age of Dante. Their verses, few, and forgotten even in Italy, might attract the curiosity of the antiquary rather than the interest of the man of taste. Their biography would prove perhaps a more exciting subject; most of them were men of lofty character, and played a conspicuous part in the history of their age.

They seem to rise before us in their old-fashioned costume of cassock and steel, each one pompously holding forth the manuscript of his *canzoniere*, on which he lays his claims to the consideration of posterity; each one leading by the hand his peerless mistress, blushing at the sound of her praises; all stately forms, dark and solemn, assuming gigantic dimensions through the magnifying medium of the mist of time.

* Sordello, a knight and troubadour, a native of Mantua, whose memoirs are confused with vague and contradictory legends, was born towards the close of the twelfth, and flourished towards the middle of the following century; he lived at the court of Provence, and at that of Ezzelino da Romano, whose sister, Cunizza, he is supposed to have seduced. He distinguished himself by deeds of valour, and died a violent death.

The very first of the number, of whom indeed, as of Faliero in the hall of the Great Council at Venice, nothing can be discerned but a black veil and a name, is Ciullo d'Alcamo, and under his bust are sculptured a few rude stanzas of the first Italian songs we have left. Ciullo remains behind a noble group of Sicilian bards, of judges, knights and notaries, constituting the court of the second Frederic, flourishing half a century after him. Frederic, a bard himself, and an Italian by birth and education, a knight, a scholar, a liberal patron of learning and genius, stands foremost with all the height of his commanding figure, stretching the ample folds of his imperial and royal purple, as if in the attitude of patronage, over his courtiers and minions; like the prince of darkness, hiding under the splendour of his crown the scars left on his forehead by the burnings of the Vatican thunders. By his right side are his two sons, like him, initiated in all the apprenticeships of knighthood and minstrelsy; and by his left the wretched victim of a moment of his inconsiderate wrath, the butt of courtly treason and calumny, his accomplished secretary, Pier delle Vigne, turning towards his lord the hollow sockets whence his eyes were wrenched, and tendering to him the bowstring with which he strangled himself in his dungeon*.

Opposite to the train of the Sicilian monarch, more bold, more distinct, more luminous, may be seen a crowd of republican poets from Lombardy and Tuscany: that one,

* Pier delle Vigne, born towards the end of the twelfth century, chancellor of Frederic II.; his ambassador to the Pope, A.D. 1232—1237; his orator at Padua, 1239; his advocate before the Council of Lyons, 1245. Accused of high treason, he committed suicide in his prison, 1246. Pier delle Vigne was accused of being the author of that famous treatise, "*De tribus Impostoribus*," a work intended to declare war to all religious revelation, which was equally laid to the charge of Frederic II., and others, and which probably never existed.

in the martial accoutrement of a Ghibeline warrior, tall, erect, with a manly, disdainful bearing, is Guido Guinizelli, from Bologna. The next one, small, slender, and active, his spare limbs enveloped in a black rustling gown, his cunning brows shaded by the large brim of a school-master's cap, his arms loaded with the huge folios of his "*Tesoro*" and "*Tesoretto*," which he holds clasped with more than paternal fondness, is Ser Brunetto Latini, a nobleman, a magistrate, an ambassador, who gave up all honours and dignities for a humble chair in a grammar-school, as if prophesying that on that school was his name to rely for immortality. Next to these two, but younger in years and greater in fame, walking with a slow and sickly step, bending to the ground his pale forehead and his hectic cheeks, his veins heated by the deadly fever he caught in his exile, follows Guido Cavalcanti, once a high-souled, warm-hearted, Ghibeline partisan, now a weak mind in a worn frame, wavering between religious bigotry and sceptic incredulity, riding a long pilgrimage to St. Jago of Galicia, whilst musing on the solution of the great problem with which his contemporaries accused him of being incessantly occupied, "whether it could be found out that God was not."

All these poets, and Fra Guitton d'Arezzo and Dante da Maiano, and his lovely Nina, the eldest Italian poetess, and a small number of others whose names could be added, gave us only languid imitations of the love-songs of the Provençals.

We find among them no ballads, or lays, or *tensons*, or satires, none of the tales and legends of chivalry.

But we repeat, what has been preserved of that primeval Italian literature is no fair representative of what was most popular in that age. The language and versification of those poets could not have reached such a state of perfection, nor the style of the first novelists and historians of the same epoch have displayed such a degree of high finish,

if they had not gone through the progressive stages of improvement in some previous attempts which must have been lost to us. It seems even obvious that those Platonic effusions could not be greatly relished, if they could be understood at all, by the lower classes. The Italian poets had many of the faults of their Provençal models; but few of their characteristic beauties. They had indeed purified their love-songs from all the extravagance of troubadouric licentiousness; but they had also deprived them of their most vivid colours, of all warmth and vigour of sentiment. They rivalled and even surpassed them in refinement and straining of thought, and they could boast of a more pure and sober diction; but all these advantages were obtained at the expense of stiffness and barrenness, of dulness and monotony. The excellence of those productions seems to have been valued by their immediate posterity, only in regard to correctness of style and language; and this was too often the test to which the merit of Italian literature was universally referred.

Meanwhile, neither those cold and languid *Canzonieri*, in whose scattered relics it would be difficult to recognise the elements of the greatness of Petrarch, nor the few tales of the anonymous predecessors of Boccaccio, nor the more obscure specimens of Italian minstrelsy, which may be supposed to have been the forerunners of Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto, could any longer be the literature of Italy. A free nation, engaged in wide speculations of commerce and industry, in endless experiments of municipal democratic institutions, labouring under the feverish excitement of active life, and enlightened by the rapid diffusion of useful knowledge in her numerous schools, could only look upon the frivolous dreams of chivalrous poetry in the light of an idle pastime. A vague feeling must have gradually prevailed that literature ought to have a nobler mission than to minister to the convivial festivity of a feudal tournament, or to promote the ebrious riots of a popular holiday.

The court and castle had had their own literature ; it was now time that there should be a literature for the people.

The severe pursuits of the Italian universities had already, as we have seen, been made subservient to the interests of the people. Only those schools, from the very nature of their primitive institutions, laboured under the dead weight of an illiberal erudition. They clung to the past with a doting, retrospective veneration, unaware that their mission should have been to adapt the lessons of the past to the wants of the present.

On the other side, a warm and wild effusion of life from the remotest regions of the East had spread over Europe, and started up a thousand rosy creations ; dazzling the imagination with all the brightness of the clouds of a summer evening.

Italy had laid the foundation of an edifice which she might, perhaps, never be able to raise as long as she slumbered in the past ; but France had raised an edifice which, not unlike one of her fairy castles, floated in the air without foundation. Italian learning might probably have withered like the last sear leaves of a lingering autumn ; but French minstrelsy was to vanish like the first blossoms of a premature spring.

The Tartars and Turks in Asia and Africa, the Dominican inquisitors in Spain, put out the last sparks of that Arabian light which had shone in two-thirds of the old continent. The crusades against the Albigenses of Languedoc hushed the warbling of the Provençal nightingales like the first roar of a hurricane. The long wars of England and France drowned the last lays of the northern minstrels in blood. Feudal discords and disorderly elections subverted feelings and manners in Germany ; and the harp of the minne-singers, that had rung so nobly at the court of the Swabian emperors, fallen into the hands of vulgar meister-singers, gave only a few low, unheeded notes, that died off among the yawns of an idle populace.

Hence the Provençal is now a dead, though a modern language; the literature of Spain and Germany was revived only several centuries later; and France never had, perhaps, any original literature at all.

Why was Italian literature, for a considerable interval, destined to survive alone? Why was that faint spirit of poetry which it had derived from Spain, Provence, and France, to lead to a result which none of those countries had been able to secure for themselves? Italy, too, had wars and factions, and she never recovered from the evils of foreign inroads without plunging madly into her intestine feuds; but the air of liberty breathed over the land, and it is among the most usual wonders of liberty to turn all elements of individual power to the common end of social progress.

The elements of literature were at war in Italy at the close of the Middle Ages. There was, on the one hand, the unwieldy mass of scholastic erudition; on the other, the unsubstantial spirit of romantic poetry. The hand of genius was required to bring those elements together, to complete the work of creation—that genius was DANTE.

SECOND PERIOD.—ITALIAN REPUBLICS.

CHAPTER I.

DANTE.

Uncertainties about the Life and Writings of Dante—A Picture of his Age—Flourishing State of the Italian Republics—Their Factions—Guelphs and Ghibelines—Bianchi and Neri at Florence—Dante's public Life—His Exile—His Death—The Divine Comedy—Loftiness of the Subject—Its Difficulties—Its political Spirit—Religious Tendencies—Working of Dante's Mind—Hell—Purgatory—Paradise—Moral Aim of the Poem—Its Manner—Its Translators—Italy and Dante.

“To be great and unhappy”—such is the sentence stamped on the brows of him whom Providence selects for its highest designs, and against that sentence the gifted one is seldom tempted to murmur. True loftiness of mind is never unattended by a corresponding nobleness of character; and glory is endeared in the eyes of her suitors in proportion as the enmity of fortune, and the malignity of men, set her smiles at a higher rate. A man of genius belongs to no age; the whole future is his inheritance, he is the contemporary of all the generations to come. Justice is seated on his tombstone.

But to the memory of Dante justice was very late, if ever, awarded.

Not only was there for him no shelter against the tossing of the tempests of life, but not even the grave, his last

refuge, was spared. His mortal remains were searched for with all the rage of party spirit, and, but for the interference of generous friends, even twenty years after his death the threshold of the tomb would have been violated, and his ashes scattered to the winds.

New generations ensued, upon whose effeminate ears the clashing of those verses of adamant sounded like harshness and rudeness, upon whose degenerate morals the sternness of that rigid temper had the effect of a constant upbraiding. Such of his works as had escaped the papal interdict sank into wilful neglect. The holy strains of the inspired patriot lay low and obscure, like the chiding of a doting censor, and when, at different intervals, an ephemeral enthusiasm awoke in Italian bosoms a vague longing for the lessons of their earliest master, the divine precepts were found disfigured, and the fountain of truth troubled.

But it was doomed that the warmest friends of Dante should prove no less fatal to his memory than his bitterest enemies. No sooner was his sacred poem rescued from oblivion than it fell into the hands of a swarm of commentators, who seized upon it like ravens crowding upon the body of a fallen warrior. Under pretence of rescuing the original text from the injuries of age and ignorance, of tearing asunder the veil of mysticism and allegory in which the poet, indulging the taste of his age, had mantled his eternal truths, they plunged the *Divine Comedy* into an ocean of doubt; they racked, they cramped, they stretched the sense even of its most lucid poetical effusions, to shape it after their own narrow-minded conceits; they made of it a maze of enigma and mystery, a mosaic of quibbles and acrostics, a monster which timid minds cannot approach without awe and superstition.

At length, in our days, Ugo Foscolo, a kindred genius, has turned his efforts to follow, in its soaring, the genius of Dante. His discourse on the text of the *Divine Co-*

medy, written, as it was, when age and exile had fitted him rather for contemplative than creative pursuits, is still the work of a poet, and has rendered justice to the poet. It has cleared the fame of Dante from the stains of the calumnies of his opponents, and from the smoke of the incense of his worshippers. It has driven the pharisees and money-lenders out of the temple. It has levelled to the ground all the wretched systems and hypotheses by which we had hitherto been introduced to the perusal of Dante.

True, Foscolo has demolished more than he could rebuild; he met with obstacles that it was in the power of no man to remove. The poet is still in many passages impenetrable, but he is a poet at least; a great deal remains for us to regret, but a great deal more has been restored to our admiration. Where Foscolo had no means of bringing light upon his subject, he endeavoured, at least, to make us aware in its full extent of our ignorance.

We have learned, distinctly and beyond all doubt, that not a single line of that poem has been preserved in its original autograph; that all we read of it is taken from manuscripts, appearing at late intervals, in different places, adulterated by time, by ignorance, and party spirit; that those different texts upon which we are compelled to rely are but too often and too sadly at variance; that scarcely any thing can be fairly determined concerning the epoch, or the place, in which the poem was written; that the whole of Dante's life, but especially the period to which the greatest interest is attached—his exile—is related in absurd and contradictory terms, whilst not one of his lines was dictated without direct allusion to the hopes and fears which wrought within his soul in the different stages of his anxious existence.

The discourse of Ugo Foscolo is evidently tending to a literary scepticism, which ought to be recommended as

most salutary to all admirers of Dante. The blind obstinacy, by which commentators pretended to account for every thing, has been too long the principal cause that nothing could be understood. The blank that time and adverse circumstances have brought upon our knowledge of the poet's mind cannot be filled up with vain gratuitous conjectures. The spirit of Dante must be studied in his verses, in his text, bare of all commentary. The Divine Comedy is to be read without any other aid than a previous knowledge of the spirit of the age in which the poet moved, and of which that work was a vast, vivid, all-embracing reflection.

The youth of Dante was passed in Florence, then the most free and stormy, as well as the most refined and flourishing, among the cities of distracted Italy. Born of an ancient family of noble extraction, he was bred up in ease and affluence, and enjoyed all the advantages of an excellent education. In that earliest period of his age he was permitted to indulge in deep and recondite studies, in dreams of love and poetry, in the cultivation of all liberal and chivalrous accomplishments.

But that was no age to allow the scholar the uninterrupted pursuit of his abstruse speculations, or the bard the enjoyment of his harmless melodies, or the citizen the comforts and affections of home. It was an age of strife and violence, of excitement and restlessness, when every city lay in a perpetual state of siege, when every citizen slept in his armour. All individual means and powers were made subservient to the common interest; the lands and houses of private men, their families, their lives, their bodily strength, and mental faculties, belonged by right to the republic.

At the age of twenty-four, Dante was already obliged to lay aside books and verses, and with that versatility of genius by which men of that age seemed to multiply themselves he donned the armour and fought the battles

of his country—he sat in the councils that ruled over its destinies—he advocated its glory and interests as a legate abroad, and promoted its welfare as a supreme magistrate at home—until, involved in the civil discords that tore Florence as well as all the rest of Tuscany and Italy, he was, in his thirty-seventh year, plunged into all the calamities of exile.

From the peace of Constance to the age of Dante, who was born in 1265, nearly two centuries had elapsed, during which Italian independence had proceeded with almost uninterrupted prosperity.

The two sons of Frederic II., Conrad and Manfred, had successively fallen victims to the jealousy and ambition of the popes. The last, heir to all the virtues of his father, a warrior of lofty mind and captivating manners, had rallied the noblest champions around the Ghibeline standard, and would have given that party the preponderance, and vested in his person the rights and dignities of the then vacant empire, had not Pope Urban IV. called to his aid Charles of Anjou, brother of St. Louis of France, who, at the head of a body of French cavalry, seconded by the combined efforts of the Guelphs, accomplished the conquest of the Two Sicilies. The heroic death of Manfred could not suffice to assuage the inveteracy of priestly hatred. His excommunicated bones were dug up from the lowly grave to which the piety of his enemies had consigned them, and strown on the blood-stained field, to rot and bleach under the inclemency of the seasons*.

Three years later, Conradin, the son of Conrad, the last of the Swabians, a young hero of eighteen, forcing himself from the fond embrace of his foreboding mother, crossed the Alps nearly unattended, trusting his cause to the sympathy of the Italian Ghibelines, and, at the head of a pow-

* Battle of Benevento, defeat and death of Manfred, A.D. 1265.
Battle of Tagliacozzo, death of Conradin, 1268.

erful army raised by the Lombard republics, he marched against Naples to claim the crown of his fathers. His partisans rallied around him, they bled for him, they sheltered him with their bodies, until, left almost alone on the field, the royal youth was overwhelmed by numbers, and, falling into the hands of unrelenting foes, he was sacrificed in cold blood to their cowardly policy.

The Guelph party had thus prevailed, and Italy almost universally acknowledged French and Papal ascendancy, when the arrogance and libertinism of the conquerors of the Two Sicilies soon roused in the heart of the enthralled nation their native jealousy and vindictiveness. The magnanimous rancour of one man, Giovanni da Procida, ripened the seeds of a long-cherished conspiracy of more than ten years' standing; and, by a sudden burst of popular effervescence, snatching from the French the sceptre of Sicily, and involving them in a long war against Aragon, relieved the rest of Italy from all apprehension of the influence of the House of Anjou*.

The Sicilian Vespers have long been made a subject of horror and execration among civilised nations in after ages. The shade of mystery under which the awful deed was perpetrated has caused it to be considered in the light of a treacherous assassination; the atrocities inseparable from that scene of bloody execution have reflected disgrace upon the sanctity of the undertaking. But the blood shed by a people in the vindication of their independence falls upon the head of the usurper who urged them to such fatal extremities. The laws of nations and the rights of humanity no longer apply to a conqueror who saddens and tortures the image of his Creator in the person of his fellow-beings. The boundaries of each country were determined by the works of God. He who invades the home of his neighbour is no longer a brother.

* Sicilian Vespers, March 30, 1282.

By the Sicilian Vespers the power of France was thus utterly neutralised, nor could any foreign ruler ever since exercise any influence on the affairs of Italy, except by placing himself at the head of some of the numerous factions with which the country was raving, invited and supported by the arms of the Italians themselves.

The Tuscan and Lombard republics, secure in the enjoyment of their independence, had reached their highest degree of prosperity. They displayed that ardour of public spirit, that soberness and energy of private virtues, which freedom alone is wonted to foster. The plainness and modesty of their manners at home formed a noble contrast with the magnificence exhibited in their public edifices, in the monuments they raised to the Divinity, and in the asylums they opened for the refuge of suffering humanity. It was in that age that those cathedrals and palaces were erected which formed the wonder of after generations. It was in that age that the republic of Florence bid one of her architects "build the greatest church in the world."

The fine arts rose simultaneously, and advanced with gigantic steps. Architecture and sculpture led the van of their sister arts; and had their chief seat in Tuscany, under the disciples of Nicolas of Pisa. Painting was restored in Florence by Cimabue, and by his pupil and rival Giotto, a friend and familiar of Dante, whose lineaments he transmitted to posterity; whilst another of his friends and masters, Oderisi da Gubbio, revived the art of miniature painting; and Casella, who numbered also Dante among his pupils, gave a new life to the science of music.

It was in such intercourse, and under the tuition of Brunetto Latini, who had opened in Florence a school for grammar and rhetoric, and of Guido Guinizelli and Guido Cavalcanti, who then disputed the palm of poetical valour, that the blessed adolescence of Dante was spent.

Wherever he passed, from one to the other of the

Italian universities, to Bologna, to Padua, he found the love of study, and the culture of taste in the fine arts, blended with the ardour of liberty, and with the martial spirit of the age;—for, letters and arts want excitement; they can sail with all winds, but not without wind; great minds expand in proportion to their own exertions: they exult in the heart-stirring commotions of the great drama of life, in the conflict of factions, in the tumult of wars. Give a genius passion and movement, delirium and fever, anxiety and suffering; let the mountain-stream madden through rocks and over precipices, dash and foam against bridges and dikes, but let it not exhaust its might on the plain, to stagnate in marshes and mire.

Wherever he passed, the poet traversed the wide plains of Lombardy, smiling with plentiful crops, the reward of a laborious husbandry, aided by a spirit of enterprise that rescued marshes and swamps from the bed of rivers. opened canals, and raised dikes, edging and fencing that garden of the vale of the Po, whose fertility forms, even in our days, the envy of foreigners.

He might see the blue waves of the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian seas glittering with a thousand sails, loaded with the treasures of the East, with articles of wealth and luxury, with which the West was still unacquainted: he might visit in Lombardy the forges where the armour was tempered and burnished that covered the breasts of all the feudal barons of Europe; in Tuscany the silk factories, where the mantles and trains of their proud ladies were woven. He might meet on the road of the Alps crowds of those shrewd Lombards, who at the peril of their lives established the first rudiments of banking and money-exchanging in France, in England, and Germany.

He might converse at Venice with Marco Polo and other daring adventurers; and at Rome with the missionaries on their return from their eccentric pilgrimages, relating wonders of the golden realms they had explored, and of

the stars of an unknown hemisphere they had been the first to salute*.

He found every where a growing, stirring, bustling population, who seemed to feel crowded and confined at home, and panted for adventure and excitement abroad. Here, Bologna marshalled forty thousand of her combatants within her walls: there, Genoa manned her fleets with thirty thousand sailors, whilst the colonies of that city on the Bosphorus, and in the Black Sea, nearly equalled the wealth and power of the capital; and the emperors of Constantinople were often braved on their throne by the repeated attacks of their restless neighbours, whilst Venice might boast, with good reason, of having extended her sway over one-fourth and a half of the Roman empire†.

And if it is true, as it has been often averred, that his love for the arid study of polemic divinity and scholastic philosophy led Dante in his youth to the university of Paris, and even to Oxford, the contrast between what he had viewed in those countries, and what he met on the better side of the Alps, must have cheered his patriotic heart with ineffable joy at his return.

The comparison is now sadly inverted; and the Italian who travels along the rivers of France, or on the railroads of England and America, who witnesses the rapid growth of New York or Manchester, has reason to smile with pity at the exulting vaunt with which the happy ones point out the results of their present prosperity, or at the sanguine hopes they entertain of endless future improvement: for

* Marco Polo, born at Venice about the year 1250, of noble family; starts with his father and uncle for the East, 1271; visits Tartary, China, and part of India; sails from China to Persia. Returns to Venice, 1295; prisoner of the Genoese, he writes the description of his travels during his captivity, 1298; set at liberty, 1302; died, 1323. "*Delle Maraviglie del Mondo da lui vedute.*" First edition, Venice, 1495.

† Or rather, of the Empire of Romania, as it has been recently observed.

the mournful experience of his country teaches him that nothing can last here below; that every nation has its own day; that the more a country has arrived at the height of success, the more, by the perpetual alternation of human vicissitudes, it fosters the germs of disorganisation, and hastens to its ruin.

The first and most permanent source of evil for the Italian republics lay in the spiritual and temporal influence of the popes.

The day had been when the pontiffs of Rome had, for their own security, advocated the interests of the people, when their legates were seen stepping forward amidst the fray of brotherly feuds, preaching the truce of the cross; when one Giovanni di Vicenza, a legate of Gregory IX., an inspired monk, a prophet and legislator, by the might of his eloquence, assembled the representatives of the cities of Romagna and Lombardy, to bring about a universal reconciliation on the Plains of Paquara, where four hundred thousand of the most conspicuous partisans, Guelphs and Ghibelines, headed by lords and bishops, and by their magistrates, riding in all the pomp of their municipal chariots, knelt at the friar's feet, and abjured their old grudges, swearing an eternal amity that was to last, alas! only a few months*. The day had been when Alexander IV. preached a crusade against the first usurper of Italian liberties, Ezzelino da Romano, and hunted from town to town the hydra, from each drop of whose blood a new tyrant was to shoot forth†.

But that day had passed long since; and the popes, abusing the gratitude of the people, to whose efforts they were indebted for their preservation, set no limits to their pretensions; they forced the allied cities to minister to their religious persecutions, and share in the wars which they waged against the pretended enemies of the faith.

* A.D. 1233.

† A.D. 1259.

Those same Giovanni di Vicenza and Leo da Perego, and other legates of Gregory IX., followed by the Dominican ministers of the Inquisition, erected their tribunals in the squares of the cities; hundreds of Cathari and Paterini, and other sects, connected or not with the Albigenses of Languedoc, who had perished by the crusade of Simon de Montfort, expired in the flames before the eyes of a horror-struck, reluctant multitude, whose notions of liberty rather inclined to toleration of opinion and freedom of inquiry*.

The age was still wild with daring extravagance; the activity of men's minds knew no limits, and the most eminent geniuses, from Frederic II. and his secretary, Pier delle Vigne, down to the noblest friends and masters of Dante, and Dante himself, loved to dwell on dangerous doubts, constantly waylaid by their specious logic; and the suspicion of heresy, and even of open infidelity, was often courted as a mark of superiority of intellect.

Thus by a strange contrast, whilst the roads and bridges seemed too narrow to give passage to the numberless hosts flowing to the revivals and jubilees, whilst the thresholds and floors of holy shrines were kissed off by the devotion of bigoted enthusiasts, Fra Dolcino, a hermit of epicurean tastes, a precursor of the *Père Enfantin*, preaching the easy doctrines of the *communauté des biens*, and *communauté des femmes*, nearly in the same terms in which they were to be revived five hundred and thirty years later, attracted an immense crowd of votaries, male and female, whom he kept feasting and revelling at the expense of the faithful, robbing and ravaging the mountains of Canavese and Montferrat, until, besieged and taken by famine, he was burnt at the stake with the fair partner of his orgies, and twelve of his apostles and proselytes—a sad instance of the fate that awaited, in that iron age, all innovators,

* Establishment of the Dominican Inquisition, by a bull of Innocent III., dated A.D. 1216. Burning of sixty heretics at Verona, 1233.

while the good sense and soberness of our days needed no more formidable weapon than ridicule to laugh the Saint Simonians out of fashion*.

But the intolerance of the popes in spiritual matters would have proved, perhaps, less pernicious than their interference in the more worldly concerns of political questions.

The factions of the Guelphs and Ghibelines, which the peace of Constance, or, at the latest, the death of the second Frederic, might have happily ended, were opened afresh by the crafty ambition and jealousy of the pontiffs. The bondage of Italy to the empire had been long since broken for ever. It was long since enfranchised Lombardy had any danger to apprehend on the part of divided and exhausted Germany; every free town was considered, behind its walls, and even in the open field, more than a match for the whole host of an emperor. The Imperial or Ghibeline party, could then no longer hope or wish to restore, in its full extent, the absolute sway of the Cæsars of Germany.

But a natural feeling of admiration and gratitude for the princes of the house of Swabia, a sense of duty, of faith, and-allegiance; the ideas of greatness, of splendour and dignity attached to the imperial crown; the fond recollections of the glories of Rome, and the hopes of seeing them realised in their visions of an Italian unity; their continual experience of the evils resulting from municipal dissensions and popular anarchy—caused the dispersed remnants of the discomfited aristocracy, and the warmest supporters of Ghibelinism, to regard the present state of things as one of interregnum and transition; to cling fondly and closely to the vain phantom of a demolished empire; and to view with mistrust and indignation the slow and wily arts by which pontifical hypocrisy attempted to erect a theocratic throne on the august metropolis, which

* A.D. 1305—1307.

had been, and they expected would be still, the seat of empire.

On the other hand, an unbounded, undiscerning love of independence, the intoxicating exultation of triumph, and an inextinguishable hatred and rancour against all remains of feudalism and monarchy—the illiberal prejudices of municipal rivalries—the excitement of the public debates of a popular sovereignty—inspired the largest mass of the people, and the heads of the Guelph party, with the blind presumption that every city could suffice, and ought to belong to itself; or that, if common interests or dangers should require the renewal of their confederation, their natural bond lay in the sacred unity of their common faith, their national banner was to be the standard of the church—that standard with which all their most intimate and indelible affections were virtually blended—that standard under which their pious fathers had rallied, when, with the blessings of Alexander and Innocent, they had, by prodigies of valour, repeatedly crushed the pride of the Frederics in the days of the formidable Lombard league of happy remembrance.

Such were the main purposes by which the most sincere partisans of the Guelph and Ghibeline factions were actuated.

But, as is too generally the case in all political divisions, every party, righteous and sacred as it is in its origin, and so long as it is only the organ and representative of a principle, ceases to be so as soon as it is made subservient to personal views.

Thus the populace, who always adhered to the Guelph party, only obeyed, however, the impulse of its leaders; and these, whatever the class they belonged to, whatever the principles by which they were raised into power, had no sooner obtained it, than more or less openly they embraced aristocratic views, and joined the ranks of that Ghibeline party by which alone power seemed to be secured

and sanctioned; while the nobility, by birth and feelings always staunch Ghibelines, serving, however, their private passions, their family feuds and jealousies, not unfrequently sided with the Guelphs, and embraced the cause of the people.

The elements of the two parties were nearly balanced in all cities; but when, either by sudden internal commotion or by external influence, one of the two prevailed, the other was dispersed by massacres, banishments, and confiscations, to return afterwards at the head of neighbouring auxiliaries to exert, in its turn, equally awful retaliations. Wave after wave the two opposite factions were ebbing and flowing from one end of the country to the other.

The frequency of murders, the appalling perpetrations of domestic tragedies, gradually undermined the basis of sound morals, on which alone the sovereignty of the people could harmlessly subsist, and ministered to hereditary animosities, which no human interference could any longer reconcile. All tender and kind affections were scared from the most gentle bosoms by the habitual spectacle of revolting atrocities. The innocent emotions of love not seldom added fuel to the vehemence of political passions.

Here Imelda Lambertazzi sucked death from the wounds of her lover, who had fallen at her feet pierced by the poisoned daggers of her brothers. There Buondelmonte paid with his blood the outrage of which he had rendered himself guilty, by deserting a noble maiden to whom he had plighted his faith.

The bonds of family relation, even to the remotest degree, were held in a reverence of which we have no example in our days, except perhaps in the Highlands of Scotland, or in the forests of Corsica. The next of kin hastened to the injured party, espoused their quarrel without examination, stained the points of their swords and poniards in the blood of the slain, and flew to the pursuit

of the murderers. Soon doors and windows were fastened, barricades were stretched across the streets—all trade and intercourse were at an end—blood flowed in the squares, in the churches, in the halls of justice. The alarm was spread from town to town; whoever had old accounts to settle seized the opportunity; whoever had no quarrel of his own embraced that of his neighbour.

Brawling and fighting were the elements of the age.

The balance, however, could never be so nicely established that it might not be perceived, in the midst of those complicated contentions, that Milan and the great majority of the Lombard cities inclined to Ghibelinism, whilst the Guelphs more constantly prevailed at Florence and in the rest of Tuscany, with the exception of Pisa; and as Ghibelinism naturally led to aristocracy, and aristocracy paved the way for the usurpation of tyranny, so the Lombard republics were early engaged in desperate struggles to resist the attempts of their nobles, who, under the pretext of favouring the interests of their party, and securing public order and tranquillity, were bringing into their hands the supreme power of the state.

Thus, in the age of Dante, nearly every city in Lombardy had invested with the highest magistracy some of their noble families; and although the forms and insignia of their municipal institutions were still nominally preserved, yet, by accustoming the people to acknowledge an hereditary supremacy, the basis of future absolute sovereignty was gradually laid.

Truly, the people did, by repeated revolts, shake off the yoke to which they were not yet thoroughly schooled, and the reaction was sudden and formidable. The whole country was filled with wandering tyrants, who had too soon or too far reckoned upon the passive endurance of the people, and who considered themselves fortunate to have thus escaped the worst consequences of the resentment of the dormant lion, whom they had undertaken to tame.

The first attempts at novelty are apt to prove fatal to the innovators.

The fate of Ezzelino da Romano was not a sufficient warning to the ambition of Alberigo his brother, and he fell, like him, a victim to popular fury, stabbed to death with his wife and children in the hall of his palace at Treviso *. William of Montferrat, who had extended his sceptre nearly over all Piedmont, taken prisoner by his subjects of Tortona and Alexandria, was shut up in an iron cage ; nor could his near relationship to the Greek emperor and the king of Castile, nor could any remonstrance or menace withdraw him from the vengeance of those fierce republicans, who dragged him from town to town, exhibiting him like a wild monster, until he died of his sufferings after two years of captivity †. Ugolino della Gherardesca, who, profiting by the calamities of his country, had by treason and crime usurped the high dominion in Pisa, fallen into the power of an exasperated multitude, and given up to his bitterest adversaries, walled up in a dark dungeon, with two of his sons and grandsons, expired amidst those pangs of exquisite torture that the fancy of Dante alone could have dared to picture in verse ‡.

All these and a thousand such horrible scenes were constantly exhibiting all round, and nearly under the eyes of the young poet ; and he must have received their impression in the prime of youth, in that age in which such sensations were most apt to take possession of his soul, to haunt and fatigue his imagination for the rest of his life.

Florence alone, preferring the storms of liberty to the slumbers of servitude, had not, in one instance, departed from her democratic policy ; and liberty seemed, in the days of Dante, to have taken shelter within its walls.

* A.D. 1260.

† A.D. 1292.

‡ Defeat of the Pisans by the Genoese, off Meloria, with loss of 5,000 killed, and 11,000 prisoners. Final downfall of the maritime power of Pisa, A.D. 1284. Treason and death of Ugolino, 1288.

The factions of the Guelphs and Ghibelines, first brought into open collision in 1215, by the murder of Buondelmonte, had ever since disputed the field with incessant vicissitudes; they had obeyed the Ghibeline ascendancy of Frederick II. in 1248, and that of his son Manfred in 1260, when Florence was by turn subdued and spared by the more than Roman magnanimity of her exiled citizen Farinata degli Uberti; and were now at rest, since the conquest of Charles of Anjou had secured the triumph of the Guelphs in 1265.

Dante was then born in a Guelph city, and of a Guelph family, and it was as a Guelph that he was present at the battles of the republic against the Ghibelines of Arezzo and Pisa in 1289, 1290, and distinguished himself for shining valour, especially at the combat of Campaldino, in which he is represented as fighting valiantly in the foremost ranks of the Florentine cavalry. It was as a Guelph that, restored to peaceful life, he offered his talents as he had lent his arm to the service of that republic, and was engaged in several embassies, and discharged many other important functions for the course of ten years, until he was raised by popular favour to the supreme magistracy of the state.

However much it may result from various passages in the works of Dante himself, and especially from the fond and moving picture of Florence in her age of innocence, given by his ancestor, Caccaguida, in the fifteenth canto of *Paradise*, that manners had degenerated from the primitive simplicity of the ever-regretted olden times, yet is there no doubt that Florence was still the seat of all manly and austere republican virtues. The sovereignty of public opinion watched over the conduct of private men; idleness and indolence were proscribed as civil transgressions.

The people were mustered in their corporations of arts and trades, and the members of the noblest and wealthiest families sued for admittance into those fraternities, power-

ful by their numbers and unanimity, and by their right of universal suffrage. The college of the *Priori*, who, with the Gonfalonier of justice, constituted the *signoria* of the republic, were selected from the mass of those plebeian associations; and Dante owed to his skill in miniature painting, by which he was enlisted in the corporation of dyers, his elevation to the rank of the *Priori*, among whom, by the superiority of his abilities, he soon assumed a well-deserved ascendancy.

But he had reached this high station in an epoch of trial and hardship. A crisis that had long been in progress under the deceiving appearances of a profound calm, was now fatally mature.

The Guelphs, who had for more than five-and-thirty years held an undisputed sway in Florence, were not free from jealousies and animosities among themselves. The families of the Cerchi and Donati, the first accused of secretly inclining to Ghibelinism, the last considered as composed of the most violent Guelphs, were waiting for the first opportunity of rushing into an open warfare. The occasion was not late to present itself. The quarrels of the Pistoiese family of the Cancellieri, two branches of which, the Bianchi and Neri, had, from 1296 to 1300, startled all Tuscany by their frequent assassinations and skirmishes, were introduced into Florence with the pious design of bringing them to pacification; when the Cerchi, espousing the cause of the Bianchi, and the Donati siding with the Neri, the long-repressed hostilities burst forth, and discord whirled its torch madly and blindly over desolate Florence*.

It was in this dangerous contingency that Dante was raised to the council of the *Priori*. He had belonged, by birth and by choice, to the faction of the Cerchi, nor had he

* A.D. 1300.

been reconciled to the opposite party by his marriage with Gemma, a kinswoman of the sanguinary partisan Corso Donati, the great leader of the Neri, and Dante's personal enemy—a lady of proud spirit and of high birth, but with whom, notwithstanding she had brought him six children, he seemed never to have been at peace, either owing to the ever-verdant remembrance of Beatrice Portinari, the first, the only love of his tenderest age, the subject of his juvenile rhymes, the source of his inextinguishable regrets; or owing to the ungracious temper of his wife herself; or, finally, to the bias of those same political antipathies which he had fondly hoped, by that ill-sorted alliance, to overcome.

But though his native predilection inclined him to favour the Cerchi, and, in consequence, their allies, the Bianchi; as a magistrate, he listened to no party spirit, and the most virulent champions of the two parties were, by his advice, confined to the two opposite frontiers of the republic.

The Bianchi, however, who had been relegated to Sarzana, having remonstrated against the unhealthiness of the place, and one of them, the poet Guido Cavalcanti, a friend of Dante, having fallen dangerously ill, they were in an evil hour recalled.

The Neri, who felt themselves wronged by this act of partiality, had recourse to Pope Boniface VIII., with whom they had long since opened secret negotiations, and who was bitterly adverse to the Bianchi, in whom he apprehended ill-disguised favourers of Ghibelinism. The Signoria, aware of these hostile dispositions, charged Dante with the mission of expostulating with the pontiff in Rome. But the false priest, while he entertained the poet with fair promises, sent to Florence, as a mediator, Charles of Valois, the brother of Philip-the-fair, King of France; who, rallying the dispersed Neri, let them loose

against their adversaries, issued decrees of proscription and confiscation against the Bianchi, pillaged and ravaged their property, and rased their houses to the ground*.

This was the convulsion which decided the fate of Dante.

He was accused of the basest offences—he was sentenced to pay an enormous fine; his property was forfeited—his house pillaged and rased to the ground. Subsequently he was condemned to be burnt alive, when he began that career of wandering and misery that was to end only with his life.

He was then in his thirty-seventh year.

He joined the other Florentine exiles, who assembled in the territory of Arezzo, and as the Bianchi already were, perhaps, Ghibelines in their heart, and had now no other resource left, they joined the Ghibelines of Arezzo and Pisa, the inveterate enemies of the Florentine republic. Having thus raised men and arms, headed by Count Alexander da Romena, and by a council of twelve leaders, of whose number was Dante, they appeared with ten thousand combatants at the gates of Florence. Owing, however, to some dissension among their chiefs in the plan of attack, their efforts proved unsuccessful, and they were repelled with heavy losses†.

Overwhelmed by this last reverse, Dante crossed the Apennines with bitterness and despondency in his heart, and sought refuge in Lombardy.

The Lombard republics were now, as we have seen, hopelessly wrestling against all-pervading tyranny, arming the chiefs of one party against another, shedding torrents of blood, no longer with the hope of destroying, but only by a blind necessity of changing their masters.

Already the Della Torre and Visconti disputed the sceptre of Milan with alternate success. The Este in Fer-

* A.D. 1302.

† A.D. 1304.

rara, and the Della Scala in Verona, founded a slower but surer basis of absolute dominion. It was at the courts of these tyrants that Dante, now an open Ghibeline, but still a proud, insubordinate republican, was compelled to sue for hospitality.

To follow him in his long wanderings, trusting to the accounts of his various biographers, would be a tedious and unprofitable task. The devotion of the Italians for his memory in after ages has given rise to a hundred idle traditions. Inscriptions are to be found in several districts, pointing out with pious idolatry the apartments he occupied, the desk on which he wrote, the stone on which he sat, and, as it were, the very impress of his footsteps. He was in Padua in 1306, at the house of the Marquis Papafavi; he attended a Ghibeline meeting at Mugello, and was, in the same year, a guest of Morello Malaspina, Marquis of Lunigiana, a generous and courteous lord, who forgot old political differences in his eagerness to welcome the victim of misfortune.

How long he roamed abroad; in what period of his career he was in Casentino with Count Guido Salvatico, or with the Lords della Faggiuola in the mountains of Urbino; when and how long he was cheered by the hospitality of Bosone de' Raffaelli da Gubbio, a learned and accomplished Ghibeline, and, like him, a man more used to the frowns than to the smiles of fortune; whether he wrote a great part of his poem in the monastery of Santa Croce di Fonte Avellana near Gubbio, or at the castle of Tolmino in Friuli, when a guest of Pagano della Torre, patriarch of Aquileia; must be left to the ingenuity of his commentators to conjecture.

His favourite abode, however, and one to which he seems, by his own confession, to have repeatedly repaired, was the court of the Lords della Scala in Verona.

This reigning family consisted, in 1306, of two brothers, Alboino and Cane, the last of whom, a youth of eighteen,

by his splendour and liberality, by his brilliant chivalrous qualities, was eminent among the princes of Lombardy, and was looked upon as the pride and hope of the Ghibeline party.

How far Dante may have shared in the common illusion so as to endure the thralldom of a courtly life, and swell the gaudy train of that young hero, cannot now be satisfactorily demonstrated. Certain it is, however, that Italy beheld more than once the sad spectacle of the wandering poet, of the silent, pensive, solitary scholar, of the soft-speaking, grave-looking, absent-minded dreamer, whose milk of human nature calamity had turned into sour misanthropy, clad in his plain garb of grey cassock, his stern brows shaded by his uncomely cowl; his pale, careworn, long visage composed to an ill-repressed expression of utter scorn, lost and neglected at the prince's levee amidst the simpering, grimacing, noisy crowd of satellites, sycophants, and jesters, amidst the thousand vile beings who in all times and in every court never fail to find favour in the eyes of the great by that natural law of assimilation, by which (as Dante himself bitterly replied to his patron's taunting insinuations) "like loves like."

But if he cherished for one moment the hope that the valour and ambition of Cane might alter the course of fate, bring about the humiliation of his adversaries, and restore him to the home of his fathers, that hope must have been speedily undeceived. Italy was as yet ill-trained and reluctant to servitude; and the new usurpers, far from having leisure to conspire against the peace of their neighbours, could hardly keep ground against the tide of popular rebellion, and watch over the conspiracies of their own subjects at home.

Hope failing after hope, the home-sick exile, consumed by chagrin and by powerless rancour, disgusted with the arrogance of his patrons, and the baseness of their minions, the sternness of his temper raising enemies against him in

every quarter, felt his courage repeatedly overwhelmed by calamity. He then had recourse to his studies ; plunged headlong into the deepest of his theological and philosophical researches ; followed in their infant discoveries the physical sciences, astronomy, and mathematics ; and revisited those seminaries of learning, in which, by the vastness of his encyclopedical lore, by his valiancy in public dissertations and disputes, he had left, from his earliest youth, the most dazzling reputation.

A day dawned at last under brighter auspices, at the epoch of the descent of the Emperor Henry VII., of the house of Luxemburg, into Italy.

The German throne, vacant for seventeen years, then indifferently reorganised by the sovereign genius of Rodolph of Hapsburg, and suffered to relapse into utter disorder under Albert of Austria, had now finally fallen into the hands of a monarch who, unable to restore peace and order in Germany, had spirit of enterprise enough to look for better fortunes in Italy. Dante, who, like all other Ghibelines, had never ceased to look towards Germany for the redress of their wrongs, and had by several epistles, and by more than one apostrophe in his poem, invoked the mediation of Henry's predecessors, now hearing of the emperor's disposition, resumed his former spirits, and started forth, in his treatise "*De Monarchia*," as the advocate of the rights of empire.

Henry, meanwhile, had crossed the Alps at the head of only two thousand cavalry, offered his mediations to, and exacted the homage of, several cities with various success, and, joined by a large Ghibeline host, had undertaken the siege of Florence. Dante did not, on this occasion, bear arms against his native city ; but his voice of repinings and despondency had now resumed a tone of invective and menace : he declined the ignominious terms on which he had been offered readmission, and shut against himself all possible means of future reconciliation. Henry was, in the

meanwhile, repulsed from Florence, after a few months of ineffectual siege, and died, poisoned by a monk with the sacrament, at Buonconvento near Siena, leaving the Ghibelines in a worse plight than he had found them at his arrival. This occurred in 1313.

Dante resumed his studies, his wanderings, his miseries. He crossed the Alps once more, and was received with wonder and applause among the doctors of the Sorbonne in Paris. He reappeared at Verona in 1320, where he sustained a learned thesis on the two elements, earth and water. The excitement of these public exhibitions had a tonic effect on his shattered nerves, and he was heard to repeat, "that the fame he was acquiring had power to reanimate him even in the bitterness of exile." In the same year he repaired to Ravenna, where peace at last awaited him, and final rest from all the evils of life.

There reigned in Ravenna, in those days, and for more than fifty-seven years, Guido Novello da Polenta, an octogenarian sage, renowned for valour and prudence, a liberal patron, and no mean cultivator of all noble studies, and who had learned mercy from his own experience of the reverses of fortune.

There might, perhaps, be still in his outward apparel, but there were certainly in the inmost core of his heart, the traces of the deep mourning he had worn for the loss of a beloved, apparently of an only daughter, that incautious Francesca, whom his wakeful remorse still smote him for having sacrificed to the selfish views of a cold reason of state. That tragedy was now far back in the past*; but the lonesomeness to which the bereaved parent had been left must have allowed little chance for the healing mediation of time, and the poet must have found that court such as the sympathies of a distressed mind would have chosen as its fittest abode—a house of sorrow.

* A.D. 1288.

His generous host, not satisfied with evincing the highest regard for the exiled bard in his palace, thought he could afford diversion to the preyings of his mind by engaging him in a difficult message to the republic of Venice. But the ill success of his embassy so deeply affected the susceptible heart of the poet, (who, under the outward aspect of stern misanthropy, was open to the fondest emotions, and loved, as he hated, with all the vastness of his colossal faculties,) that he fell severely ill of vexation and disappointment, and hastened back to Ravenna, where he arrived in time only to expire in the arms of his friend*.

Guido had no sooner laid the mortal remains of the poet in his humble grave, and paid a tribute of praise to his memory by a few words at his funeral ceremony, than his hoary hair and his piety were of no avail to shield him against the storms of public life; and, forced from his seat at Ravenna by a sudden start of hostile faction, he also closed his days in exile in the following year.

Excepting his juvenile rhymes of love, and the *Vita Nuova*, a romance of his pure and heavenly affection for Beatrice, all the works of Dante in his exile were, by the constant fretting of his uneasy mind, left incomplete†. There was only one conception—that one on which he dwelt with longer and fonder intensity—for which no toils were spared, no relaxation indulged—"the sacred poem to which heaven and earth had lent their hand, which had for many years worn and exhausted him"—only one monument on which he lived to see the last stone laid—the *Divine Comedy*.

Be it true or not that he had conceived the first plan of

* September 14, 1321.

† Dante's Latin works: "*De Monarchia*"—" *De Vulgari Eloquentia*," Paris, 1577. Italian works: "*La Vita Nuova*"—" *Rime*," Venice, 1527. "*Il Convito*." First editions of the "*Divina Commedia*," Foligno, Mantua, Verona, 1472. Complete editions of his works, Venice, 1741, 1757.

that poem, and had written seven cantos of it, whilst living at home, it is certain that never did that work assume its form and consistency, never did its author concentrate all his thoughts, all his hopes upon it, until after his expulsion from Florence; and the Divine Comedy is to be regarded altogether as the work of his exile. It was the work of all the rest of his life, and it might be proved that he was, to his last day, constantly at work, adding or suppressing, recasting and correcting as he was influenced by circumstances, as his hopes were fading and colouring, and his passions ebbing and flowing.

So much for Dante's biography. A poet's life may be written in one page. Not so the history of his after-life. His mortal career, like his mortal remains, occupies but six feet of ground. His genius, like his undying soul, can be circumscribed by no limits of time and space.

The contemplation of the achievements of a supreme intellect gives rise to sensations analogous to the raptures experienced by the Alpine traveller. The presence of a great mind has upon us the same effect as the view of the loftiest prodigies of nature. In both cases we become instinct with the greatness of surrounding objects. Our exaltation is commensurate with our speechless amazement. The air grows keener and lighter as the hills swell threateningly around. Our lungs dilate, our very frame and our whole being expand at every step we climb on that daring flight of heavenward stairs.

The study of Dante brings us to the summit of one of the most towering alps of human intelligence. The insight we obtain of the depth of his conceptions raises us in our own estimation, inspires us with new faith in the vastness and comprehensiveness, in the illimitedness of our human faculties. By the side of him, on the thousand fathoms' pedestal reared up to him by the reverence of after ages, we become, as it were, part of him—one with him.

But the reading of Dante is an arduous task. To com-

prehend the spirit of the poet we must lift ourselves up to a level with him. We need climb the mighty peak to perceive its gigantic dimensions. We are to strive and toil through the weary ascent, till we leave behind the gulf of time and space that yawns between us. We must strain all our powers of abstraction till we actually live in him.

To say nothing of its greatness and goodness, the Poem of Dante is the most curious of books. The register of the past, noting down every incident within the compass of man's memory—the Gothic edifice with its hundred niches, every niche a shrine or a pillory, consigning a name to endless futurity. The debating ground for all vital problems, for all futile questions, such as will equally haunt and harass the fancy of an ignorant and superstitious generation, on the first awakening of its almost childish inquisitiveness. The treasury of all learning, human or divine, visible or invisible. The maze of deep-shrouded allegories, allusions, abstractions, puzzling sybilline riddles. Vast, recondite knowledge, set down in metrical hieroglyphics. Such is Dante: with such views must his spirit be searched in his time-hallowed pages. The annalist, the interpreter, the representative of the middle ages, Dante is especially identified with that most obscure, but most interesting period of human history. We sum up once more the leading ideas of mankind during that transitional era, as the most natural introduction to the study of Dante.

The formation of human societies had begun under circumstances analogous to the phenomena of primitive creation. It was night upon the earth, and "darkness was upon the face of the deep." The nations of Europe were slowly emerging from chaos. Wave after wave, the flood of northern barbarism had settled upon the surface of ancient civilisation, and the subsiding waters had left thick layers of bare and swampy, but, as it proved, not barren, alluvial soil.

The half-smothered plants of the former culture began

slowly to struggle through and re-germinate, deriving fresh vigour from the fertility of the superincumbent stratum. The colossal ideas of the Roman world were reproduced on the very outset of mediæval regeneration; among these towered the proud edifice of Roman ambition—universality of dominion.

Nothing more sublime or generous than this same social catholicity—this absorption of all kingdoms into one vast empire, of all human tribes into one family—this concentration of all local resources into one means of common welfare—this uniformity of law, of creed, and language—this organisation of a state without limits, of a community without neighbours or strangers—without friends or foes!

This system of *civilisation by unification*, to which peace, free trade, and education, are but too late, too slowly, too imperfectly, tending in our own days, the Romans had all but established eighteen centuries ago. Truly, they had achieved it by force of arms. But the law of the strongest was then also the law of the wisest, and civilisation invariably followed close on the steps of conquest.

In the middle ages, though a more difficult, it seemed yet a practicable scheme. The great Roman notion survived the final destinies of Rome. The barbaric chieftains, who had been so busy at the demolition of the empire, aspired now to its reconstruction. Their ambitious spirit caught fire from the smouldering ruins on which they had based their throne. Charlemagne and Otho of Germany had well nigh laid the world beneath their rule.

Nor was the work of civilisation now to be effected merely by right of might. Universality of dominion was now to be cemented by catholicity of faith and worship. The world was, henceforth, to acknowledge "One God, one Pope, one Emperor."

Now, of this strange triumvirate one was in heaven; but the Earth was too narrow to harbour the two others at

once. Emperor and Pope, Church and State, were, ever after, pitted against each other for pre-eminence.

Truly, Charlemagne and Otho, though crowned at Rome, had their home in the north. Still were they styled Roman emperors: they were by right kings of Italy, and Italy was still the centre of civilised life—Rome, still the metropolis of the Christian world. The centralisation and fusion of mankind into one people, the plenitude of the times—peace and order, could only take place when the successor of the Cæsars should be restored to his natural residence on the capitol. This restoration of the seat of empire at Rome, this return of the eagle to its native eyrie, was the object of the ardent longings of the noblest spirits. No one dived deeper into that redeeming idea than the clear-sighted patriot, Dante. Only, against the furtherance of this scheme, militated the ambition of the pontiffs. The high priest was unwilling to make room for the monarch.

Sovereigns, in the middle ages, reigned, but ruled not. Feudalism in France and Germany, municipal democracy in Italy, had stripped the sceptre of all substantial power. Emperors and popes were, in reality, at the mercy of their vassals. They were but a name and a standard—formidable or contemptible, according as the great tide of opinion set in for or against them. Every petty lord, every mean town had its own weight in that anarchic political scale. Papists, Imperialists—Guelphs and Ghibelines—the two parties perpetually shifted their ground, blending a thousand local interests with the great cause of mankind.

But parties, in the middle ages, however hostile, were never bent on utter extermination. They loved fighting for its own sake, they warred for the assertion of unmeaning claims, for the vindication of idle privileges, for the enforcement of vain forms of vassalage. The most arrant Guelph, the most inveterate Ghibeline, were equally pene-

trated with the idea of the necessity of the coexistence of a pope and emperor. The great difficulty arose in the nice definition of their respective powers, in the equitable settlement of their mutual demands. Dante was born a Guelph, in a city zealous in the support of that cause. After his banishment, he was compelled to take refuge with Ghibelines, and thought to have adopted the maxims of these latter. He has been, therefore, charged with apostasy; the name of "fierce Ghibeline" has been applied as a by-word to him—designating him as a partisan of a foreign despot, a foe to popular freedom.

But Dante never was at heart Guelph or Ghibeline. With views widely above the notions of his brawling contemporaries, he made, as he bravely expressed it, his own party, and aimed at a reconciliation of all parties, under what seemed to him the only practical social system.

The empire was for him an abstract principle. He revered the crown—no matter on what brows it was laid by Providence—as the rallying point for all the factions of distracted Italy. Nothing but the iron hand of a supreme ruler, he urged, could heal the wounds of that bleeding country. He evinced no hostility to popular freedom; but he thought that streams of civil bloodshed, proscriptions, banishments, all the atrocities of intolerance and misrule, were but indifferent symptoms of rational liberty. He beheld all the cities of Romagna and Lombardy fallen from excess of licentiousness into the hands of the most unlimited, galling tyranny. One legitimate master was for him preferable to a hundred despots. Imperial authority never had been, never, by its organic constitution, could be despotic in Italy. An emperor—no matter where he was born—could be no French or German prince. He was *the emperor*, that is, something by virtue of his office essentially Italian and Roman. The estrangement of the crown from Italian heads, the absence of the Cæsar from Italy, was the result of national degeneracy; it was in its turn

the source of all national calamities. On the restoration of the ancient order of things, rested all hopes for future harmony and peace, all hopes for Italian independence, greatness, and happiness in after ages; all hopes for that preponderance which Italy was still destined to exercise for the enlightenment of the human races—for that social and moral ascendancy, for that intellectual dominion, which Rome would once more assert on the gratitude, not on the terror, of subdued nations.

Unity of church and state in Italy—peace and civilisation to the world—such were the great, and, as contrary events too fatally averred, prophetic views of Dante's loyal patriotism. Had the stubborn republicans of his own times never lost sight of his awful warning, had they all been Ghibelines, in Dante's own sense of the word: had they all joined under the standard of such men as Frederic II., or Manfred of Puglia—the cup of misery which ages of bondage and abjection have not yet thoroughly drained, might have been suffered to pass from the lips of their guiltless posterity.

Again. Dante was a staunch Papist, a believer in one Catholic, apostolical Roman church. He showed everywhere the same instinctive dread of division. He abominated religious sectarianism as he detested political faction. Christianity and unity of faith and worship were indissolubly associated in his mind. He thought the empire itself, originally, eternally intended to body forth the universality of the church. He was for an unlimited centralisation of ecclesiastical hierarchy. There was to be a high priest on earth as there was a Supreme Being in heaven. No man ever entertained a more overweening sense of the sacredness of pontifical ministry.

And it was precisely this transcendant reverence for the indelible character of the vicar of Christ, that rendered him so inexorable against the hideous specimens of depravity, whom he beheld seated on the chair of St. Peter. Dante's

pope must be "a priest, a Levite, a king of prayers, lord of the sacrifice," far removed from the turmoil of human passions; for the sake of his own dignity, placed beyond reach of the tempests of political life.

Few men's works have been more widely and more intensely read than Dante's; and yet no man's character has been more egregiously misunderstood. From Boccaccio to Leigh Hunt, his friends, no less than his adversaries, have dwelt on the poet's "ferocious hates and bigotries," and painted him as a man narrow-minded in his views, implacable in his enmities, blind in his partialities.

Dante was, undoubtedly, a man of strong convictions, of a proud, disdainful spirit, of violent passions; but his uprightness and conscientiousness were always commensurate with the extreme excitability of his feelings. He was a fearless, uncompromising lover of justice and truth; led into error, may be, by his passions, or by the passions of his age; but unshaken in his stern independence, in his unswerving consistency.

The presence of a great criminal, or the recital of any startling enormity leads him to inveigh against a whole city, against a whole people, against all mankind, with an outburst of indiscriminate indignation; a too close adherence to his social principles makes him visit with the most severe censure, deeds, virtuous in themselves, honest in the motives that dictated them, but fatal in their results upon the cause of humanity; but no instance occurs of indulgence in personal feeling.

As a warrior, as a citizen, as a magistrate at home, as a lonely and destitute wanderer abroad—as a ruler over a riotous multitude—as a sullen and ungracious courtier in the palace of the great—he was invariably actuated by the same strict conscience of duty, which set him at variance with all existing parties, hastened his downfall at Florence, and aggravated the desolation of his friendless exile. And it was this same keen sense of right, this fast tenacity

of opinion, which rendered him bigoted and intolerant, though it may be proved that, even in the hottest ebullition of his withering disdain, the principle, not the person, was the object of his enmity. The Florentine magistrates who signed the iniquitous sentence of his banishment, as well as other relentless persecutors, never obtained the honour of the most passing allusion in that book where no one was forgotten; and Pope Boniface VIII. himself, to whom the poet justly referred all his public and private grievances, becomes sacred in his eyes the moment the agents of Philip of France lay their hands on his inviolable person—a sacrilege which the pious Catholic stigmatised as tantamount to a re-crucifixion of Christ. So much for Dante's bigotries and personal rancours.

Thus in his age of premature decline, when, hope withering after hope, he receded from active struggle, and renounced the expectation of hastening by his own hand the maturity of his momentous designs—when, at war with his own generation, he drew his cloak around him, and shunned the contaminating intercourse of men—he resolved to refer his own and the world's cause to the judgment of posterity, and to bequeath to a more righteous race the treasure of his redeeming ideas—he determined to write.

From his earliest childhood, a deep, an ardent votary of knowledge, drawing from the fresh-flowing sources of science with all the idolatrous enthusiasm of a Cimmerian for a new-dawning light, Dante had, as it were, multiplied his existence, to reconcile the genial enjoyments of contemplative life with the arduous duties of his public career. As a poet and a scholar he had already no equal, when he only sought rest and relaxation in his intellectual pursuits.

But henceforth his learning must become an instrument—his genius a weapon. His song shall go forth as *the word* among the latest generations.

He sought, then, a subject as unlimited as his own powers

—a world-embracing theme, to which no topic could be extraneous; by a daring abstraction he aspired to fathom the infinite.

Sore beset with the misunderstandings and disappointments of this life, he looked for redress and justification in another. Dante sought out another world—a world of his own, in which the one he had so long been worried in, should be judged and sentenced.

The ideas of mankind were in those dark ages perpetually revolving upon that *life beyond life*, which the omnipresent religion of that fanatical age loved to people with appalling phantoms and harrowing terrors. Dante determined to anticipate his final doom, and, still in the flesh, to break through the threshold of eternity and explore the kingdom of death.

He would “sweep adown the gulf of time,” sound the great mystery of the hidden world, lay it bare to the gaze of terrified mortals, and startle the earth with the awful tidings of Heaven and Hell.

A minister of retributive justice, he would visit the shades of men anciently or recently departed; he would unmask hypocrisy, and restore crushed innocence; chastise arrogance, and assuage sorrow; mediate between the helpless dead and the oblivious survivor; above all, reveal the annals of the fast-fading past, and turn its teeming records into a severe lesson for the present—into a threatening warning for the future.

The meeting of illustrious dead, whose very sight would ever after “exalt him in his own conceit;” the interview with lately departed, long-lamented friends, whose undying love would soothe the wounds of his sensitive heart; the exultation of the righteous, the confusion of the reprobate, the impartial dealing of God’s eternal justice, which would reconcile him to the temporary prevalence of human iniquity—all throughout his unearthly progress enabled him

to indulge in a ceaseless outpouring of his over-wrought feelings.

His political theories respecting the equitable distribution of secular and spiritual powers—his views of a total reformation of Church and State, on which the destinies of his ill-fated country so virtually depended—his cosmographic notion of earth and firmament—his conjectures as to the essence, the attributes, and the eternal activity of the Deity—all his opinions, the result of deep thought and unwearied research, should now receive the sanction of super-human testimony. His doctrines should flow from the unerring lips of ancient sages, of the apostles and doctors of the church. The most abstruse problems should find a solution; the most controverted truths should be tested by the arguments of heavenly doctrine, in that transparent etherial region where is the end of all doubt. Angels and saints should now become his authority.

And Dante, be it remembered, had his own saint in heaven, a guardian saint praying for, watching over him. Beatrice, the love-dream of his childhood—the vaguely worshipped idol of his untried heart—the sacred torch of truth and virtue treasured up in his bosom with the pious vigilance of a vestal—Beatrice, now guiding his star, the fairest flower of Paradise, the purest angel of God.

That same Beatrice allegorically invested with the sublime character of divine knowledge, commiserating the grievous errors of her ancient adorer, led astray by the violence of earthly passions, bewildered by the din of political factions, will now solicit from the eternal court permission to escort her beloved into heaven. She will be his Mentor and teacher as soon as the Latin poet, Virgil—also an allegorical character personifying human reason—shall have led him through the circles of the gulf of darkness and up the steps of Purgatory—as soon as

purified of human frailty, and freed from mortal error, as soon as regenerated by immersion in the waters of oblivion, he shall be worthy to gaze upon her beaming countenance, and to steal one of her looks from the entrancing contemplation of the beatific vision.

No poet ever struck upon a subject to which every fibre in the heart of his contemporaries more readily responded than Dante, when he undertook to write his *Universal Gazetteer of the kingdom of death*—his hand-book for travellers to Heaven and Hell.

Soldiers and priests, in modern times, alternately govern the world. A peal of the organ is antiphonal to a flourish of trumpets. To an age of brawling and blustering, a period of fasting and psalm-singing succeeds—a palmy era of tract societies and evangelical alliances. A procession of monks treads on the footsteps of invading hosts. Abbeys rise on battle-fields; and cowled or surpliced foxes snatch up the prey for which lions and tigers are bleeding to death.

But in the age of Dante praying and fighting went side by side. The ark of the covenant rose in the midst of martial encampments. The priesthood of Christ gloried in the name of church-militant. The bishop said mass in his coat-of-arms, and rival fraternities knocked each other down with their crucifixes. The whole system of faith and worship was made to fit an age of outrage and violence. Christianity ruled by terror. Religion was then indeed the *fear* of God. Fear of the devil had been a more appropriate expression. Human laws had no hold on the guilty besides the gallows. The gospel had no argument stronger than Hell.

There was to have been a day to which the sons of man foresaw no morrow—a day in which this globe was to be effaced from its system, and all the living at once summoned to their final account.

The year 1000, through ignorant misinterpretation of

the Scriptures, had been considered as appointed by the Supreme Arbiter as the close of time. The fated period had gone by, and the world stood on its axis as firm and safe as ever. Men tried to be ashamed and to laugh at their own credulity; but the apprehensions of the Millennium were renewed upon each centennial anniversary, and death was still present with all its ghastly cortège of doubt—of dread—of never-subsiding anxiety.

Consequently, priests and friars did not fail to make the most of that awful bugbear. Souls in temporary or in everlasting penance, met the sinner at every corner of the streets: hideous daubs on the walls, dismal carvings on the doors. Such bristling hair, such staring eyes as might haunt the most unimaginative man throughout life, and startle him from his slumbers. Their pangs and groans, their appalling curses, were daily rehearsed in the pulpit.

The very games and sports of the people had something of a diabolical character. The Arno at Florence was often tricked out into a fancied representation of the bottomless pit. The populace on the bridge feasted on the half-grotesque, half-terrible drama, till the crazy structure sunk beneath the weight of the thronging multitude; and the gulf beneath, crammed with the dead and dying, presented in good earnest the scene it had been made to resemble in frolic.

The most immediate effect of this gloomy religion had been to turn almost all Europe into one vast monkery. Nor were friars, white, black, and grey, deemed sufficient; but the world teemed with lay fraternities without number—a set of amateur monks, a kind of militia and yeomanry, subsidiary to the regular host. The roads swarmed with long trains of pilgrims in white hoods, black hoods, sacks, shrouds, and other masquerade costumes in every variety, arousing the astounded population with the mad freaks of their noisy piety. Jubilees, re-

vivals, all the worst revels of religion run mad, hand in hand with murder, arson, all the horrors of ceaseless, objectless war, anarchy, utter moral and social disorganisation; new relics brought forth every day to turn the tide of devotion; the holy coat set up in opposition to the crown of thorns; the winding-sheet puffed up to the disparagement of the swaddling clothes; holy images eternally turning up their eyes, eternally nodding their heads from their canvass; crucifixes slinking down from their crosses, and roaming about like uneasy ghosts; Madonnas shifting their quarters across seas and mountains, with goods and chattels, like tortoises with their shells, on their back.

Such was Catholicism for full ten centuries; such is it, to a great extent, even at the present day, in most parts of Italy; such it was, especially, in the age of Dante. The reformation of the militant orders, the proclamation of the first Jubilee, the *déménagement* of the house of Loretto, the exhibition of the St. Veronica, and other momentous transactions and portents of the same nature, occurred within the brief period of Dante's career.

The bigotry and fanaticism of the age was, of course, proportionate to the display of ranting devotion. Fire and sword were never busier in the work of amputation and cauterisation of the rotten members of the church. Roasting of heretics, under the name of Paterini and Cathari, the Methodists and Puritans of the middle ages, had become, in the Lombard cities, an almost daily ceremony. In his hellish pictures, surely the poet needed no better models than such as priest-ridden society exhibited every where around him.

And Dante's stern genius was undoubtedly affected by the barbarism of his age, and imbued with its ferocious spirit. Undertaken, as it was, with religious and political views, widely in advance of his benighted contemporaries, his work was, in its material parts, consonant with the

wild notions prevailing around him. Dante's Hell is a monkish Hell in good earnest, with all its howling and gnashing of teeth. His demons are *bonâ fide* devils, long-horned, long-tailed, black as they ever were painted. Melted pitch and brimstone, serpents, dragons, fire, and ice, are the ingredients of the awful mess he sets before his readers. Nay more, all such horrors are served up with such a terrible earnestness, that any honest believer of those times could sup full of them, and labour with nightmares ever afterwards.

Mr. Leigh Hunt, and other modern critics, may justly object to so very hot and ungentlemanly a place of punishment; but Dante, it should be remembered, was either himself a true believer in the church of the thirteenth century, such as it was; or, knowing that he was writing for its votaries, blindly adopted the only language they were able to understand.

To many of the followers of a more enlightened and rational Christianity, which has almost altogether shamed or laughed the devil out of countenance, the framework of Dante's Hell must certainly appear *baroque* and exaggerate. By the side of the proud and almost sublime Pluto of Tasso, and Satan of Milton, Dante's Alichinos and Farfarellos are poor devils indeed.

Strange to say, and in conformity, perhaps, with the title of "Comedy," so quaintly prefixed to the poem, the "Inferno" has its humorous passages. Dante's devils are, some of them, droll fellows, who will crack their jokes with their victims, banter and argue with them; they are rude customers more often, blackguards up to the meanest tricks, the very fathers of lies.

Spite of their frolics, however, and spite of their hideous grins, it is impossible to mistake the tragic tone that pervades the poet's mind, all along its dolorous progress; among the vainest sports of his unruly fancy, no less than in its gloomiest inspiration, the oddity or wild-

ness of conception is always set forth with terrible earnestness of diction. The powers of utterance are always in keeping with the depth and vastness of thought. There is a life-like palpableness in every object brought before us, which can be accounted for by nothing short of the actual evidence of the senses. "Verily, this man," as the old women at Verona observed, fancying they perceived, in his dark complexion and frizzled hair, the marks of his long exposure to the heat and smoke of the unquenchable fire—"verily this man has seen and touched the horrors he depicts." An eloquence impressive, efficient in the same measure as it disdains all attempts at effect—a fancy that casts and moulds not—creates, and never stoops to mere description—an inventiveness that fears no weariness, knows no exhaustion; startling, revolting, wringing our heart, rending it fibre from fibre—a phantasmagory of loathsome, dire suffering, never stopping at any climax of horror, of agony, but always seeking "beyond the deepest hell a deeper still," till it revels on the misery of beings, "whose very tears choke up all utterance of woe, clustering on the lids from intense cold, and closing the outlet against the following heart-drops which are thus driven inwards with unspeakable accumulation of anguish."

But Dante's stern genius could no less dwell and luxuriate on softer and tenderer images. What effort of human fancy ever equalled the ineffable calm, rapture, and abandonment which pervades his rhymes, when, finally emerging from that blind abyss of all sorrows, he breathes again the vital air, and descries from afar "the tremulous glitter of the ocean wave."

It is not for me to test the soundness of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, or to inquire which of the holy fathers first dreamt of its existence. It was, however, a sublime contrivance, unscriptural though it may be; a conception full of love and charity, in so far as it

seemed to arrest the dead on the threshold of eternity; and by making his final welfare partly dependent on the pious exertions of those who were left behind, established a lasting interchange of tender feelings, embalmed the memory of the departed, and, by a posthumous tie, wedded him to the mourning survivor.

There is order and method in the most grievous errors, in the most arrant follies of mankind. The finger of Providence is traceable throughout man's history upon earth. Popery and monkhood—nay, even purgatory—had their own great purpose to work out. Woe to the man, in Dante's age, who sunk in his grave without bequeathing a heritage of love; on whose sod no refreshing dew of sorrowing affection descended. Lonely as his relics in his sepulchre, his spirit wandered in the dreaded region of probation; alone he was left, defenceless, prayerless, friendless, to settle his awful scores with unmitigated justice!

It is this feeling, unrivalled for poetic beauty in Christian religion, that gives colour and tone to the second division of Dante's poem. The five or six cantos, at the opening, have all the milk of human nature that entered into the composition of that miscalled saturnine mind. With little more than two words, the poet makes us aware that we have come into happier latitudes. Every shade we meet breathes love and forgiveness. The strange visitor is only charged with tidings of joy to the living, and messages of good-will. The heart lightens and brightens at every new stratum of the atmosphere in that rising region; the ascent is easy and light, like the gliding of a boat down stream. The angels we become familiar with are creatures of light, such as human imagination never before or afterwards conceived. They come from afar across the waves, piloting the barge that conveys the chosen spirits to Heaven, balancing themselves on their wide-spread wings, using them as sails,

disdaining the aid of all mortal contrivance, and relying on their inexhaustible strength; red and rayless, at first, from the distance, as the planet Mars, when he appears struggling through the mist of the horizon, but growing brighter and brighter with amazing swiftness. They stand at the gate of Purgatory, they guard the entrance of each of the seven steps of its mountain—some with green vesture, vivid as new-budding leaves, gracefully waving and floating in ample drapery, fanned by their wings; bearing in their hands flaming swords broken at the point; others, in ash-coloured garments; others, again, in flashing armour, but all beaming with so intense, so overwhelming a light, that dizziness overcomes all mortal ken whenever directed to their countenance.

The friends of the poet's youth one by one arrest his march and engage him in tender converse. The very laws of immutable fate seem for a few instants suspended to allow full scope for the interchange of affectionate sentiments. The overawing consciousness of the place he is in for a moment forsakes the mortal visitor so miraculously admitted into the world of spirits. He throws his arms round the neck of the beloved shade, and it is only by the smile irradiating its countenance that he is reminded of the intangibility of its ethereal substance. The episodes of the purgatory are mostly of this sad and tender description. The historical personages introduced seem to have lost their own identity, and to have merged into a blessed calmness, the characterising medium of the region they are all travelling through.

But the Purgatory, and still more the Paradise of Dante, are terra incognita to most of his readers, strange to say, to most of his warmest eulogists. They sink deep into the circles of Hell till they stick fast to it, forgetting that the poet's mind towers loftier and loftier with powers commensurate to the progress of his subject.

There are forty days in Italy to the season of Lent, and

every day has its sermon. Out of the numberless legion of priests and monks swarming on that genial soil, hardly three hundred are preachers. Sacred orators there are rare birds, and as such also migratory; they wander from place to place like strolling players. A bag of forty sermons will last throughout a man's life. Written among his school prize essays, learnt by heart by long usage, the same discourses will affect, charm, or terrify a hundred audiences. Success in the pulpit depends on the look of the person, his tone of voice, and impassioned delivery. Monks, Franciscans most of all, are, generally speaking, the darlings; with the coquetry of their shaven crown, with the picturesqueness of their flowing costume. Friar Jeromes and Friar Eustaces are as notorious characters as Grisi the singer, and Cerito the dancer.

Of the forty sermons comprising his Lent stock, or *quaresimale*, the choice of subjects lies with the preacher himself; of four only the theme is given. These are delivered on appointed days. They are the test of the orator's abilities. The result of these four days' begging establishes for ever, or demolishes his reputation. The subject of these four benefit days called the *Novissimi* are the Last Judgment, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.

The first, second, and third discourse are generally impressive enough. But the stumbling-block lies on the gate of Paradise. Mental and bodily pain surround us so incessantly in this our earthly abode, that it requires no extraordinary stretch of imagination to make a good hell or a plausible purgatory of it. But where is our pattern for the home of the elected? What do we know of pleasure on earth save only sensualities, that are neither unalloyed nor enduring? The poor Italian preachers dare not draw a picture of Pagan or Mahometan Paradise; they cannot cram their auditors with ambrosia and nectar, or allure them with a *tableau vivant* of ever-vernal Houris. Aware of the partiality of their countrymen for music, they

paint the heavenly court as a never-ending concert; an orchestra of angels and doctors fiddling and strumming to eternity!

Dante, who was their authority for the realms of sorrow, had, however, supplied them with a nobler element of celestial enjoyment. The most ardent longing of the human soul whilst imprisoned in clay, he argued, is thirst for knowledge—the highest reward to the enfranchised spirit, must therefore be inexhaustible, unlimited, unquenchable knowledge.

Paradise is, therefore, a long exposition of what mortals can and cannot know. Familiar with all the learning of his own times, Dante, a phoenix of geniuses, groped in the dark in pursuit of hidden truths; he toiled, he fretted, struggling to force his way through the iron limits of human understanding, he aspired beyond, beyond! and by the aid of daring assumptions and sweeping conclusions, by the daily practice of bewildering abstraction, he often hit the mark with wondrous accuracy, and vaguely, instinctively, forestalled the more inert and plodding march of common intelligence.

Every branch of learning, in those singular times had for its ultimate object and subject—God. Colleges were almost exclusively divinity schools. All the classical lore that began slowly to emerge from the still smouldering ruins of ancient civilisation, all the arguments of the subtle and cavilling pseudo-Aristotelian philosophy, then on its utmost ascendancy, were brought to bear on the most arduous points of theology. It was at the best an idle, impertinent, unprofitable divinity; it busied itself with inextricable niceties of abstruse definitions, it sought the solution or rather the tangible representation, the materialisation of the most awful mysteries; it inquired into the age, the rank, the attributes of the complicate hierarchy of spirits; it dived into fathomless metaphysical subtleties to account for the essence, the influence, the working of the

Deity. The deluded enthusiasts ; they forgot to love and to serve while they strove to know God !

And Dante was warm in the pursuit of this forbidden knowledge, as wild as any of the *angelic* or *seraphic* doctors that preceded him. He had explored all creation ; but this glorified, without explaining, the Creator. He sought God in Heaven—saw him—and all the problems that harassed him before that terrible journey, became as simple, as obvious as every spot in the valley or the hill-side is laid bare to the gaze of him who looks down from the summit.

From that dizzy altitude, the poet assumed the tone of an oracle : all that men sought he had found. A great deal of this superhuman knowledge was, indeed, lost to him, for so utterly absorbed were all his faculties in that intense contemplation, that they could hardly recover all consciousness, and render an account of the overpowering sensation. Still enough remained of the recollection, of the reflection of the ocean of light that but for an instant encompassed, ingulfed him—to enable him to amaze with its revelation the startled fancies of his benighted fellow mortals.

Dante's Heaven is indeed heavenly. Angels' smiles beam through his verses. The progress from planet to planet, otherwise imperceptible, is made manifest to him by successive changes in the countenance of his eternal guide, Beatrice. The increased effulgence of her heavenly loveliness makes him aware he is basking in the rays of a region of purer light. Her cheeks radiate with roseate smiles in the genial sphere of Venus : they glow with a phosphorescent light in the ruddy orbit of Mars ; they fade in the silvery whiteness of the planet Jupiter, as a maiden's blush from which the crimson of sudden emotion is as suddenly seen to evanesce—and after thus passing successively through all phases of entrancing beauty, they are, all at once, bereft of their ineffable smile. Her face becomes a

blank to her lover, lest the brilliancy of that smile should prove fatal to his unprotected eyes, burn and consume him—even as Semele was turned into ashes; for, at every step in those eternal palace stairs, beauty kindles as it climbs, so that but for the interference of a tempering medium, but for a partial eclipse, mortal ken would shrink from it, even as a leaf parched and withered by a thunder blast.

As in the region of eternal doom the souls of the reprobate were oftentimes deformed by their turpitudes so as to become indiscernible to all knowledge; so are now the chosen ones beautified beyond recognition. They have, at least, to the eyes of their mortal visitor, lost all shape and semblance to human beings. They assume the appearance of blazing lights, moving incessantly round with unutterable harmony, and sparkling with redoubled refulgency when they wish to address the earthly stranger; for every word conveyed through their lips is a message of love and joy—and joy shows itself in Heaven by increase of light, and every smile is a flash.

There is something wild, vague, overpowering in the strange phantasmagory of all these myriads of lights. They revolve around us as we read, like the undefinable splendours that, some of us may recollect, haunted our cradles in childhood, when a whole canopy, as if of coloured dots of vivid flame, glittered above our heads in an apparently boundless vastness of space, and rolled slowly and steadily about, till it seemed to set beneath us, and we hung upon it, at the height of many thousand fathoms, as if ready to plunge, cradle and all, into the luminous abyss, when we started up half in wonder, half in dismay, and roused the whole household with our infantine screams.

From the moment the poet is raised into the orbit of the moon, it seems as if a cloud encompassed him, translucent, solid, and high polished, even as adamant on which the sunbeams smite. Within the bosom of this everlasting pearl he glides, as a ray of light pierces through water,

without dividing its substance: and through the faint dimness of the circumambient gem many faces are seen eagerly gazing at the new comer, even as human features appear faintly reflected in the still waves of a shallow stream. As he soars up to the sphere of Mercury the blessed souls come forth in many thousands to greet him like fish glancing through the waters of a quiet, clear lake; their eyes sparkle with celestial joy, and the more they feel their joy, the brighter they grow, till excess of light makes them utterly undistinguishable. Further up, in the orbit of Venus, they move in a mazy dance like sparks in fire, and with all the melody of voices chanting in chorus. They range themselves in the ruddy light of Mars in the shape of a cross of immense dimensions, through which they move like motes in the sunbeam, emitting an indistinct but exquisite melody entrancing the soul beyond all human comprehension. They swarm and sparkle like innumerable dazzling essences in the planet of Jupiter, warbling as they fly, and winging their course hither and thither, like flocks of birds when they wheel slowly round and round, hovering lovingly on the banks of a stream; till, after various transformations, they assume the shape of an immense eagle, and from the beak of the flaming bird their common mind is uttered, even as a multitude of glowing embers emits but one condensed heat. They flash upwards and downwards in the crystal sphere of Saturn, moving along an immense ladder, the summit of which is reared to the uppermost heaven; but here both light and sound are equally lost to the sense of a living being—and he advances among them in awful silence and solitude, as his mortal clay can endure no further till inured to the whelming sensation by bathing his eyelids in the streams of pure light eternally flowing from the all-embracing empyrean.

Yet it is neither his inventive nor his descriptive powers, unmatched as they are, that men most unanimously admire

in the genius of Dante. It is the great moral, religious idea, one and indivisible, ever consistent, which prompted, directed, achieved the work wherein heaven and earth had equal shores; the transcendent, never-lost-sight-of allegory of a human soul redeemed through the ordeal of an intense contemplation of eternity, reclaimed from worldly passions, and political rancours, by the purifying agency of love, and from this again raised to the still higher pursuit of recon-dite religious inquiry. The work of a whole existence, the *Divine Comedy* exhibits the various stages of a mind rising superior to itself by virtue of successive efforts, overcoming, step by step, the whole distance that separates the most imperfect of creatures from the perfection of the Creator. It is indeed the comedy—or say, the Sacred Drama of Life: exhibiting in the first act the tumultuous passions, in the second the gentle affections, in the third the noble yearnings of a man's heart on its heavenward progress.

I have said ever-consistent idea; for the earthly feelings of the high-minded partisan, mellowed and softened though they be by the soothing influence of the ethereal region he is lifted into, are not only not extinct or dormant in heaven, but they seem to have sunk deeper and deeper into his soul, and to have assumed the character of unshaken religious convictions.

That mysterious journey is the fulfilment of a great mission of justice and truth. There is rest for the relics of man in his tomb, but there is none for his memory. Posterity, as an immense jury, sits round his death-bed for his trial, but its sessions are adjourned to infinity. History issues no sentence that history may not repeal. A generous dispenser of praise and blame, it delights in visiting guilt within the silent sanctuary of the grave, in laying at rest oppressed innocence, still smarting and writhing under the lash of human injustice. This sublime office of supreme reviser of human judgments had Dante taken upon himself. He never swerved, never compromised with the

awful responsibility of this sacred duty: "For," he reasoned, "if I am too timid a friend to truth, I apprehend my name will not go down among the remote generations to whom the present times shall be the times of yore." Truly was Dante, even in the heaven of his own fancy, a mortal, and, therefore, an erring judge; but, we contend, a conscientious judge. And when hurling the souls of Brutus and Cassius amongst traitors and murderers, in the lowest circle of Hell, he certainly suffered his religious and political system to get the better of his moral sense; but we cannot agree with those critics who attribute these and similar aberrations of judgment to violence of temper, or indulgence in morbid feelings: they were the result of stern, deep-grounded principles, the working of irresistible fatality. God ruled over the political, no less than over the material world, with eternal, immutable laws. Mortals who, either from error or malice, opposed these laws—who wrestled with God, must be crushed in the attempt, even as he who would turn the course of the spheres, or disturb the balance of worlds.

No man ever steered clear of rocks who followed up his system to the widest extent of its generalization. Dante's catholicity of church and state too often led him to monstrous absurdities; and as his own views are uttered as the revealings of unerring, imperishable knowledge; as his own mind breathes through the eternal lips of prophets and apostles; as Heaven itself speaks through him—every paradox startles and revolts us as sheer blasphemy and impiety. For all the misconceptions of this daring mortal, God himself is made responsible!

With all these intrinsic and inevitable blemishes, however, the *Divine Comedy* is, perhaps, the most moral of books. No man ever rose from a deep, careful perusal of the whole work without feeling himself, in every respect, a nobler and a purer being. The religious tone of the poem works upon us with irresistible awe. There is a God in

him, and the terror of his presence gradually creeps upon us. There is nothing mean or gross, or impertinently minute and circumstantial in the Heaven of Dante. A pure idealisation; it may not be God's own, but it is man's sublimest conception of Heaven. The progress of the Reformation and the prevalence of scepticism on merely divine subjects, have done away with the prestige of such sublime abstractions. Mortals, in our own days, read Dante's notions of Paradise with as little enthusiasm as they would feel for Hesiod's Theogony. They are struck with the poet's ingenuity; but the belief which could invest such conceptions with the sanctity of revealed truth is, for ever, extinct in their bosoms.

It is only as a poet, not as a prophet, that Dante is known. Yet the notion that his strain would go down to posterity as a second Apocalypse seems to lurk in every one of his verses. His own images worked upon his brains till they became inspired truth in his own eyes. The long contemplation of his subject had led to an actual apotheosis of his own mind. He had soared so far upwards that the most ethereal substance of his spirit never found its way back again. The most earnest of all poetic minds, he saw and touched what other poets could only invent. His contact with God was *trans-humanating*. In that instantaneous glimpse, his thought was so thoroughly absorbed in its principle, that it never quitted it to eternity.

Such is Dante, and such will he appear to all who can read. Only men do not all read with the same eyes. Poetical beauty must work upon us by instinct. We must have it in our souls. Genius and taste are more indivisible faculties than fond critics would lead us to imagine.

There are intellectual antipathies, invincible, inexplicable. Walter Scott flung aside Cary's Dante with something of the scorn of the wild Indian for the "dumb" Book of God's Revelation. His *plastic* mind, vast and

versatile as it was, was incapable of following the deep train of thought of the greatest of metaphysical poets. He had not a particle of Dante-ism in his composition. What wonder if less gifted souls remain untouched by the spirit of Dante! Our taste for the bards of antiquity is an acquired one. The images that sprang fresh and heaven-born from their heart, sound common-place from long use and abuse. The crudeness of primitive conception ill agrees with the daintiness of our over-refined æsthetics. Modern tinsel too easily out-dazzles the pure gold of antiquity. The beauties of Dante will dawn upon us as we gaze—they will rivet our attention as we meditate—they will test the gentleness and exquisiteness of our organisation by the very depth to which we feel their impression.

No poet requires more careful reading than Dante. His rapidity and conciseness are truly bewildering. His episodes are often told in one line—his similes are expressed in three words. The “*Inferno*” alone introduces no less than three or four hundred personages to our notice. They all stand up before us, like so many statues on their pedestals; they say their word, make their short appeal to our sympathy, or awaken our horror and hatred, then fade suddenly, irrevocably away. The conjuror lifts them from their depth of oblivion, holds them but one instant suspended over the abyss, and then drops them to eternity. Little more than the name—often not the name itself—is said. Yet the vague illusion creates in our heart a longing curiosity, which the obscure traditions of the times can but imperfectly gratify.

“My name is Pia, I was born at Sienna, died in the marshes,—my husband knows all.”

This is one of Dante’s most renowned, most touching episodes. So much for Pia. All the rest is matter for endless speculation. Long poems have been written, fine pictures painted, to illustrate that fleeting illusion. Novel-

ists have been lost in vague conjectures. A sad tragedy is here hinted at. Guilty or innocent—the lady of Nello della Pietra died in the marshes in some terrible manner. But of this we have no other testimony than those four lines in which Dante stereotyped it.

Poetry like this can only be studied, not read; far less does it admit of translation. The truisms that “there are no two expressions to one idea; no synonymes, either in the same or in different tongues,” apply most forcibly here. Dante’s thought is incarnate with—lives through—the word. With him translation is murder.

To decompose one of his thoughts, would be to attempt to melt the adamant. His very harshness and ruggedness—his very quaintness and abruptness are sacred in our eyes. The things he has told could only be so told. The words he has spoken can only be spoken in his own words.

Nor is it by mere strength and conciseness that Dante’s style can be successfully emulated. Cary’s Dante is justly considered as a fine model of manly English versification. In many passages his strain assumes a loftiness bordering on sublimity, and he even clothes with an easy majesty some of the less dignified images of his semi-barbarous original. His translation, however, is any thing but a reproduction of Dante’s mind. Aware of the unmatched energy of the primitive poet he strove to cope with, the translator sought it in strained inversions and artificial structures which convey the most erroneous impression of a style than which nothing was ever more logically plain, more spontaneously flowing, more naturally graceful, supple, and elegant.

No poet, perhaps, exhibited a more astonishing variety of styles than the author of the Comedy. The peculiar tone of his mind, the impression of the moment, glances through every one of his lines. That plainness and terseness,

straightforwardness, and almost disdainfulness of diction—the immediate result of inspiration—were never equalled in after ages by any writer in the tongue of which he alone was the originator and perfecter.

Much of Dante's manner resides in the peculiarity of his verse. The *Terza Rima* is his inalienable property. Even in Italy his best imitators never produced any thing besides a mere rhapsody, a mosaic-work of Dantesque phraseology. Without his characteristic *terzine*, Dante is no longer himself. Each triplet comprehends and circumscribes its own idea, fitting it as closely as a gem in its casket; whilst the happy linking of each couplet in an uninterrupted chain gives his discourse a perennial and harmonious flow, combining uniformity with pliability, ease with majesty. Much of the vividness of the poet's graphic manner is the result of those very limits in which he was pleased to confine—to set—his thought.

In the utter despair of overcoming the difficulties of that dreaded un-English measure, Cary took refuge in a blank verse. It was, perhaps, more advisable to throw off all shackles at once, and give us his version in prose.

The English have an unaccountable dread of a prose translation. There is a doggrel blank verse, much easier, less responsible, and generally far meaner than prose, in which every dabbler in criticism is at liberty to execute a foreign poet. And yet in no language does prose assume a loftier strain than in English. In none can thought better spare the almost childish assonance of verse, and the semi-barbarous assonance of the rhyme. It is the rational tongue of the most sensible race in existence; and, not being equally distinguished for melody, it should lay no great stress on mere rhythmical resources.

For our own part, we are anxious to see Dante turned into literal but eloquent prose, though such an achievement, we are aware, would require pens tempered somewhat after

the fashion of the old biblical translators. We long for a version which may follow the poet's strain passively, though discriminately, as far as the nature of the two languages will allow, without the additional attention which the fetters of metre and rhyme must imperiously demand, without any of those untoward hemistichs, impertinent epithets, and other pitiful shifts and expedients to which the soberest versifier will occasionally be driven by the exigencies of metrical tyranny.

A prose translator lays before us a mere pencil-drawing of his original. The vividness of colouring, the flesh and blood of his model are gone; but we are at least spared the tinsel and tawdriness of an imitative dauber. Better by far the plain outlines, which leave us to shadow forth the beauties of the master-piece in our own imagination, than even the most imperceptible touch of the copyist's brush. In a translation of Dante, let us have as much of Dante as we can; but, at least, nothing but Dante.

Such a translator, we were led to expect, England would find in Mr. Leigh Hunt. The magnitude of the work, however, deterred him. The specimens of his version, known before the publication of his "Italian Pilgrim's Progress" were cold, but chaste. His heart never was with Dante's. He went to work with the listlessness of a mere essayist. Dante's sternness and ruggedness disagreed with him. He seems nowhere impressed with that veneration which can alone make a translator. He is constantly exploring, when he does not anathematise, Dante's "bigotries." His gentle soul is ruffled by the violence of the poet's temper. He is uneasy, unhappy in his work—a work which should be one of love, nevertheless. He is fond of Dante, doubtless; but his tenderness partakes of the awe of a nervous husband under the sway of a termagant.

No wonder, under such circumstances, if Mr. Leigh Hunt left his task unachieved. It was only a "Pilgrim's Progress," a better or an inferior kind of Bunyan, he presented

his readers with. The very title was disrespectful; and although some passages, especially in the "Journey through Paradise," are, in our estimation, beaming with all the brightness of true Dantesque imagery, still Mr. Leigh Hunt's readers will not rise with the most favourable ideas of the extent and manifoldness of the poet's conception.

Till some writer of equal abilities assumes the task in a better spirit, we must put up with poetic versions. And even admitting the *Terza Rima* to be all but impracticable in English, we shall not hesitate to assert that a worse choice than Cary's blank verse could hardly be made. Nothing is more unfit to represent the tracery and fretwork of that Gothic and Mediæval structure of the "Comedy" than the staid, bare metre by which modern languages have attempted to reproduce the majestic strain of antique *épopée*—that artificial blank verse which borrows its cold stateliness from elaborate inversion and mannerism—that prose bewitched in which flow and spontaneousness so readily degenerate into languor and atony, and melody into sameness and dulness.

Certainly the world could hardly have expected any thing more singular than to see a language in which Homer and Virgil appeared to the best advantage in a rhymed version—reproduce the "Divine Comedy" in what the Italians so happily call the *poltroneria del verso sciolto*, so that the people of these islands should have no other medium through which to obtain an insight into the great poet's mind, than a style which presents no bad idea of a Dante walking on stilts.

Sensible of the inadequacy of a rhymeless version, and deterred from grappling with the arduousness of the complicated rhyme of the original, Mr. Wright hit upon a *mezzo termine* which does great credit to his ingenuity. He adopted a loose *terzina*, not gracefully interlaced with the endless alternation of rhymes after the manner of Dante, but joining each triplet to the following by a middle rhyme,

somewhat after the arrangement of the two tercets at the close of a sonnet. The effect is not quite the same. Each triplet in itself sounds like the Dantesque stanza; but the chain is broken at every link, and the middle rhyme, which was intended to supply the deficiency of connexion, coming as it does at the fourth line, is not quite distinctly audible.

With all these imperfections, however, Mr. Wright's contrivance is a great improvement on Cary's intricate and unwieldy blank verse: and so great is the result of these merely material advantages, that we feel disposed to look upon Mr. Wright's performance as a more faithful representation of the manner of the Italian: and especially where the poet's fancy descends to the delineation of gentler objects, especially during the ineffable calmness that pervades the first circles of Purgatory, the smoothness and evenness of Wright's unpretending strain, humouring Dante in his own ways, and closing the sentence with the line, or at least with the stanza, have more of that air of dignity and repose, of that innate grandeur and stillness, which characterise art no less than poetry in the middle ages, and which breathes from the somewhat stiff but solemn specimens of early painting and sculpture in Italy.

Other attempts at translation of Dante in all possible measure, were made before and after the two above-named *littérateurs* brought their labours to a close. But even the fragments by such poets as Byron and Merivale are not certainly above, and the specimens by Shannon, Dayman, Parsons, and twenty others, are greatly below, the standard of the two more industrious and persevering translators.

Several of them have, indeed, striven hard to naturalise Dante's metre in their language; and no one flattered himself to have more fully overcome its horrors than the author of the "Prophecy of Dante." Byron, however, has nothing of Dante, except the three rhymes. His "asthmatic language," as it has been more wittily than reverentially characterised, his frequent breaks and dashes, cutting short

every line in the middle, as if he were labouring under a fit of the hiccough, have even less to do with Dante's smooth and equal manner than the "Hebrew Melodies" with the plainness and earnestness of biblical style.

Once more in man's frail world ! which I have left
So long that 'twas forgotten ; and I feel
The weight of clay again—too soon bereft
Of the immortal vision—

And so on, to the end of the chapter, without one stanza, without one line to be read at one breath.

But it was not, we suppose, with a view to give their countrymen an adequate idea of the Italian poet, not with a hope to nationalise Dante, that the translators have toiled. Literature is the inalienable property of a nation ; no poet, perhaps, will admit of a foreign disguise with more reluctance than Dante ; for such alone as are willing to look for Dante's spirit in Dante's own verse, are these translations available ; the one by Wright especially, on account of its superior terseness and correctness. With such a guidance to bear him through his studies, the Italian scholar will more confidently approach a book which he has hitherto looked upon with no unjustifiable dread : for the reading of Dante is, as we have often repeated, a laborious undertaking ; and the "Divine Comedy" is made rather too free with at every young lady's boarding-school : the notes which both translators have judiciously selected, the eloquent introductory discourses by Mr. Wright, and the biographical sketch by Mr. Cary, will contribute to smooth down difficulties even more efficiently than all the lumber of commentaries under which most Italian editions of Dante are groaning.

The difficulties of the study of Dante are rarely of a philological cast. Obsolete words are not of more frequent occurrence than in Shakspeare's plays. The expression is always lucid enough where the thought is : and the clearness and obviousness of the thought itself is always com-

mensurate to the degree of information on the part of the reader.

Meanwhile, though foreign nations have vied with each other in their eagerness to do honour to the "first of the moderns," though Dante, like Homer, is the man of all ages and countries, yet nowhere is his name an object of more profound worship than in his own native land. The Italians have learned to look upon their calamities as the result of their long disregard of the vital lessons conveyed in his inspired strain; they now acknowledge in him a regenerator, a prophet, too long unheeded in time of prosperity, but now hailed as the pyramid, the monumental tower, the land-mark of Italian nationality in ages to come.

The outbursts of his patriotic feelings, the episodes of Sordello, of Cacciaguida, and the like, have hallowed the poet's memory in the heart of his countrymen. From the height of prosperity which Italy had reached in the fourteenth century, Dante's boding spirit beheld the abyss of misery into which civil dissensions were ready to plunge her. He anticipated the result of those dire enmities which did not suffer brethren to "abide at peace within the compass of the same walls." He looked forward to the day when republican licentiousness would lead to domestic tyranny; and this again prepare the way for foreign dominion. He mourned over the long period of sorrow in which French and German invaders were to ride roughshod over a degenerate race—when half-a-score crowned stewards of a foreign despot were to crush and fetter all thought, and monks and Jesuits to pervert and contaminate it at its very sources—when, as a climax of misery, a mere smile of papal clemency would be hailed as the dawn of a new era—when the patriot victims would stoop to look for redress or regeneration from a power, the very name of which ever implied enmity to truth and pro-

gress, the continuance of which was the foulest blot on modern civilisation.

The fame of their earliest poet had its phases in the reverence of the Italians. The first appearance of that colossal figure, so evidently framed after the type of the ancients, had upon his contemporaries a startling effect. It seemed as if by that one performance Dante had vindicated the human mind from the charge of its gradual degeneration, and inspired modern genius with a new confidence in its own powers. "It was," to make free with the comparison of a great historian of our days, "as if, in some of the ancient games, a stranger had suddenly appeared, and thrown his quoit among the marks that tradition assigned to the demigods."

But by degrees that wonder and veneration abated. The revival of Latin, in the fifteenth century, to the detriment of the national language; the idolatry for Petrarch among the numberless crowd of his cold imitators in the sixteenth; and the progressive depravation of taste and degradation of manners in the two following centuries—had finally the result of removing from Dante the attention of the universality of readers. Only in the sacred recess of some solitary mind—in the emulous aspirations of an archetypal fancy, like Michael Angelo's—in the sympathies of a heart shattered by long calamities, like Tasso's—or in the vehemence of a stern, passionate temper, like Alfieri's—could Dante find shelter and favour. His spirit loved to dwell only where it met with kindred spirits; his verses were the test to prove the existence of true elevation of soul, and nobleness of heart.

The reaction by which the Italians, in our days, strive to atone for the long blindness of their reckless forefathers; the affecting devotion by which young enthusiasts are to be seen kneeling to the relics of their great father before his tomb at Ravenna; the prodigious diffusion of his verses—

and the supreme height to which his name has been replaced, speak highly to the praise of the present generation, and stand as a pledge of the renovation of their moral character, and of their ripeness for better destinies.

“O Italy! appease the manes of thy mighty dead!”

The justice that we pay to their memory can alone justify our proudest claims to their noble descent, and raise us to the emulation of their glorious examples.

CHAPTER II.

PETRARCH.

Preliminary Remarks—Italian Universities—The Popes of Avignon—The Colonna—Petrarch's Love—His Coronation—Robert of Anjou—The Correggio—Cola di Rienzi—The Gonzaga—The Carrara—The Visconti—Venice and Genoa—The German Emperors—Petrarch and Boccaccio—Bands of Foreign Soldiery—Reinstalment of the Papal Seat—Last Years of Petrarch—His Character—His Works.

THE poem of Dante was to Italy what the spark of the sun was to the personified clay of Prometheus. Dante gave his country a language, and language is the soul of nations. Under his powerful will, his age saw with surprise a popular dialect alternately assume the loftiest tones of the sublime and pathetic, clothe the noblest and elevate the humblest conceptions, and throw light and evidence on the most abstruse and recondite truths. The every-day words and phrases of the people appeared in those verses as a new discovery, and low-born vernacular idioms were handed down to posterity as the poet's creation. The Italian language seemed to recognise the hand of its maker. Never did it, before or after, yield to any writer's impulse, never did it display more of nerve and energy, more of brevity, suppleness, and grace. As Italy was, perhaps, never more great and more free, so never since was her language nobler or mightier.

And yet the pen of Dante was a strong chisel, by a few bold strokes marking profound, indelible features, giving life to the marble wherever it touched, but abandoning the

block unfinished, half-carved, half-polished, rude in its sublimity, grand in its disorder.

The charge of purifying and refining, of taming and softening, the language of Dante, was left to the care of two kindred twin minds, which, although perhaps of a stamp by a great degree inferior, yet grown on the same soil and out of the same elements, born quite at the close of Dante's tempestuous course, were to take up the mantle at the moment it fell from the prophet's shoulders, and accomplish what remained unachieved of his mission—Petrarch and Boccaccio.

This debt, under which the lovers of Laura and Fiammetta, have, by their juvenile works, for ever laid their Italian posterity, must be considered as utterly distinct and independent of other and higher claims, which they have a right to extend over all civilised Europe, as the first restorers and promoters of true classic literature, as the most active instruments of modern progress, by the exhibition of the light and splendour of ancient civilisation.

The distinctions between the poet and the scholar were never in any instance more widely and definitively marked than in the case of these two illustrious contemporaries and friends; for whilst, by their Italian writings, they are justly ranked among the first fathers of the national language, it must be confessed that, by their revival of Greek and Latin learning, by their enthusiastic contemplation of the treasures of antiquity which they revealed to the wondering world, they lost sight of their native literature, and gave origin to that deplorable scholastic mania which tended for two centuries to undo the work of Dante and their own, and to give an ephemeral life to a dead language, to the detriment, and nearly to the total extinction, of the living.

The age of Dante, and that of his two noble successors, are scarcely divided by any material interval of time; but the destinies of Italy were then hurried on with such

unabating rapidity, that the whole aspect of the country was changed even in the lapse of a single generation.

The life of Petrarch offers the most striking contrast to the life of Dante.

Gifted with an easier and more equanimous temper, Petrarch steered his bark with a rare prosperity, secure in the midst of the passions of a stormy age. Placed, from the prime of his youth, at the head of the republic of letters, he enjoyed the most unlimited sway that learning alone ever gave a man. Before and after him, poets had been seen flattering princes ; it was now the first and last case of a poet courted by princes. Invited to the same courts where Dante had languished in neglect and dejection, Petrarch acted the part of a mediator and arbiter, of a monitor and censor. Wherever he was, there was the best side of the cause ; his presence was solicited like that of the blind old *Œdipus*, produced by turns by his unnatural sons, as a pledge of the justice of their claims in the eyes of the Thebans.

Petrarch lived long enough to feel weary and sick of his glory. On his brows even the laurel pressed heavily. That fame which he had courted so long in his dazzling career faded in his embrace, like the charms of a fairy enchantress when the spell of magic is broken.

He was among the few to whom, before death, it was given to see his name consigned to immortality, as if he had beheld it registered in the book of fame ; and, in consequence of this conviction, his life was acted as if he had had all posterity for spectators.

His biography was written at full length in a large collection of Latin letters to his friends. In his most intimate expansions of familiar correspondence, he wrote in the round periods of the language of Cicero, and seemed rather occupied with the public than with his friend. Nor were the living alone honoured with his correspondence ; for he directed long, elaborate epistles to his favourite heroes of

antiquity; and the last, not least of all, "*Epistola ad Posteriores*," he dictated for the edification of posterity, as a man who felt well assured that posterity would be busy about him.

I could, therefore, be at no loss as to the materials on which the following biographical sketch should be grounded. His whole heart and soul were decomposed, as it were, in his writings; and, whatever opinion we may form of his character, there he stands, judged and sentenced by his own words.

In that sudden political convulsion which expelled the Bianchi from Florence in 1302, and of which Dante was, as has been said, the first victim, was involved a man of noble descent, then occupying the high station of notary of the Florentine republic, called *Petracco dell' Ancisa*. Of him and his noble lady, *Eletta Canigiani*, who shared her husband's fate, Petrarch was born, in Arezzo, the 19th of July, 1304, on the very night when the Florentine exiles, with Dante and *Petracco* among the number, made their last ineffectual attempt upon Florence.

Petrarch tells us of himself that he had an opportunity of seeing Dante at his paternal house, in Arezzo, in his seventh year; and the stern features of that solitary genius seem to have left upon his mind an indelible impression among the colourless dreams of his infancy.

Following the destinies of his parent, the future poet was conveyed to the court of the pope in Avignon, and was successively sent for his studies to Carpentras, Montpellier, and Bologna, where the old notary intended to direct him through the legal studies, to tread in the career of his father.

The Italian universities followed, at this period, their learned pursuits with unabating fervour. Placed in the heart of populous and turbulent towns, they enjoyed within the recess of their walls a comparative calm and security. Learning was, like religion, a common property

a subject of universal veneration, which it was equally the interest of all parties to honour and favour.

Unfortunately, those literary establishments, from the very tenor of their original constitution, formed themselves into a party, and operated a division in the state. The spirit of caste and corporation, indivisible from a social order, hardly emancipated from misrule and anarchy, kept them constantly wrangling and wrestling for their privileges against the encroachments of other equally jealous, equally ambitious, equally powerful bodies ; so that it was not unfrequent to see the university halls broken in by the populace, who made a bonfire of the chairs and benches, and drove professors and students from town to town.

The university of Bologna, the most ancient in Italy, if not in Europe, continued, notwithstanding the excommunications of Clement V. in 1306, the most frequented and famous.

The memory of Irnerius and of Accursius, in the thirteenth century, gave that town an undisputed ascendancy over the studies of civil and canon law, in that age the most important and most influential of all learned pursuits.

One of the greatest luminaries of the law-school of Bologna, when Petrarch was sent there for his studies, was Cino da Pistoia, a profound scholar, and an eminent poet, who, obliged to leave his native town in consequence of the civil feuds of Bianchi and Neri, increased the number of those Tuscan wandering *fuorusciti*, who were then to be found all over Europe.

Another of Petrarch's kindest masters was Giovanni Andrea da Bologna, whose taste for Pandects and Decretals seemed to pass as an inheritance to his children, even of the gentler sex ; if we are, at least, to believe the legend of his daughter, Novella, who, in the prime of her age, was so far proficient in such arid studies as to fill the professor's chair, during her father's absence, and deliver

her lectures. Sybil-like, however, she took good care to screen her lovely face behind a curtain, "lest her beauty should turn those giddy young heads she was appointed to edify and enlighten."

It is, however, but justice to remark, that the story is equally applied to one of Accursius' daughters; and that the names of other ladies occur among the list of doctors at Bologna, where a young beauty, clad in a professor's gown, is not, even in more recent ages, a spectacle utterly unexampled*.

Meanwhile, the irresistible turn for classical literature, for which Petrarch had already endured his parent's displeasure at Montpellier—where the scene between Ovid and his father was acted over again—was hardly to be expected to abate in Italy, and especially at Bologna, where Cino himself was looked upon as the sweetest of living poets, and continued to his last day to dote on women and sing for love. The example of his benevolent instructor, his familiarity with classic models, and his intercourse with many of the ardent Italian youth at the university, many of whom remained his friends or patrons for life, hastened the development of Petrarch's precocious genius, so that, when recalled to Avignon, in his twenty-second year, and, by the death of both parents, left master of himself, he gave full scope to his juvenile inclinations, and set out,

* Accursius, disciple and rival of Azzo, one of the pupils of Irnerius, the greatest of Italian lawyers in the Middle Ages, was born at Florence A.D. 1151 or 1182; died, 1229 or 1250. His great work, "*Corpus Juris Glossatum*," was first printed, 1529. His son, Francis Accursius, was equally eminent.—Cino da Pistoia, banished from his native city in consequence of the disturbances of Bianchi and Neri, 1307; appointed professor at Bologna, 1314; was equally a professor at Treviso, Perugia, and Florence; died, 1336.—John Andrea, of Bologna, born in Tuscany, professor at Padua, 1330; called to Bologna, 1332; died of the plague, 1348.—Bartolus and Baldus, both pupils of Cino, flourished about the middle of the fourteenth century.

with all the impetuosity of an ardent temper, on his way to immortality.

Avignon was, in that epoch, the seat of the papal government, which the turbulence of the Roman factions and the policy of Philip of Valois had removed from Rome since the year 1305. The world was yet to witness something more depraved than the court of Rome, and that was the court of Avignon. The grandeur of the papal seat seemed to be eclipsed, when it ceased to be environed by the majesty of Rome. The French popes rivalled, indeed, even surpassed, the Italian pontiffs in deception and perfidy, in luxury, in avarice, in every shape and manner of vice; but the dignity and authority, the strength of mind, the headstrong independence, the daring ambition, which had humbled monarchs before the successors of St. Peter, were not virtues to be so easily inherited.

Placed under reach of French influence, under pretext of protection, the French popes acceded to the slightest wishes of royalty with cowardly connivance. Already Clement V. had blindly gratified the vengeance of Philip the Fair by the foul assassination of the Knights Templars in 1311. John XXII., his successor, shared the tithes of the church with the rapacious Philip of Valois; while, by an open sale of indulgences, of all ecclesiastical honours and dignities, he defrayed the expenses of a court as extravagant and licentious as it was corrupt and venal.

It was thus from his earliest youth that Petrarch's upright and generous soul was brought into contact with what vice could exhibit most revolting and hideous; and notwithstanding his frequent invectives and execrations of that scandalous court, it would be painful for his admirers to see him so long and so often take his residence in Avignon, were it not well known how sadly, from his earliest youth, the poet laboured under tender and some-

what morbid sensibilities, which seldom allowed him to follow the soundest dictates of his reason.

The first object of attraction to the papal court was his friendship for a Roman youth of his own age, whom Petrarch had first seen at Bologna. This was Jacopo Colonna, one of that haughty family who, in the absence of the popes, exercised an absolute supremacy in Rome.

This family, one of the few scattered scions referring their origin to the Roman patricians of old, had for several centuries been signalised in all its branches by such traits of hardihood and magnanimity, as well could justify their claims to that noble descent. In all their pursuits, whether ecclesiastic or military, they carried along with them that martial spirit, that undaunted resolution, which their ancestors bore on their shield, together with their proud motto, "*Columna flecti nescio*," and which decided all differences in their favour*.

The memory was not quite extinct of that warlike Cardinal Colonna, who followed the crusaders to their conquest of Egypt, and who, after prodigies of valour, taken prisoner under the walls of Damietta, and condemned by the Saracens to be sawed through the body, put so serene a look on the preparations for that awful torture, as to disarm the native ferocity of his executioners, who rewarded his heroism by granting him life and liberty, and dismissed him with every demonstration of honour and regard.

The Colonna had reached their height of prosperity under the pontificate of Nicholas IV., one of their name, in 1288; but in later times, dispersed and banished by the treacherous rancour of Boniface VIII., they had been

* The Colonna were probably of German descent. Their family records ascend no farther back than A.D. 1066, towards which epoch they were already lords of Palestrina. Several branches of the family are still flourishing.

forced to take shelter in France; when Sciarra Colonna, entering into the interests of Philip the Fair, accompanied by a few French barons, at the head of his partisans, had surprised and arrested the false pope in Anagni, menaced and struck him with his iron gauntlet; so that, though soon rescued by the fanaticism of the populace, Boniface died in a few days, in a paroxysm of powerless rage*.

At the head of the family was now Stephano, brother of Sciarra, a hoary warrior, after the antique Roman cast, father of ten sons, two of whom, Cardinal Giovanni and the above-mentioned Jacopo, resided at the pope's court in Avignon.

The last, a young prelate, scarcely issued from the university, showed himself worthy of his race by his spirited conduct at Rome in 1328, at the epoch of the descent of Louis IV., who, having by intrigues and treasons gained over a council of schismatic bishops to his cause, received from them the golden crown, in opposition to pope John XXII.: when young Colonna, followed only by four attendants, read in St. John of Lateran the papal bull of excommunication with drawn sword, offering himself ready to support, against the emperor and his adherents, the rights of the pope, and the justice of his cause.

There Petrarch's natural advantages of personal comeliness and captivating manners, united to the early display of eminent talents, and to a constant, though unobtrusive, desire of pleasing, rendered him soon a desirable acquaintance amongst the best circles, and eventually called upon him the attention of the whole college of cardinals and the pope himself; while his gentle and loving disposition secured for him a popularity seldom attendant on rapid and dazzling success.

But another argument, more powerful than either friend

* A.D. 1303.

ship or juvenile love of fame and ambition, was soon to bind Petrarch more indissolubly to the dangerous sojourn of Avignon.

He had seen Laura.

This memorable event, which he took good care to register in his works in prose and verse, in Latin and Italian, with scrupulous accuracy, took place in the church of *S^{te}. Claire*, in Avignon, early in the morning of Good Friday, April 6th, 1327, the poet being then in his twenty-third year.

It is not my intention to write over again, for the thousandth time, the love-romance of Petrarch and Laura: I shall only venture so far as to express the utter scepticism into which every impartial critic must be naturally led, after consulting all authorities within his reach, concerning the object of Petrarch's flame; for it cannot, according to my opinion, be quite satisfactorily demonstrated, whether the poet was in love with a single woman, or with a "wise and dutiful wife sorely tyrannised by her jealous husband, and mother of a numerous family," as, upon the authority of an awkward abbreviation in a paltry old parchment, it has been rather hastily asserted. Nor is it well determined whether Petrarch's own assurances are to be taken literally, and we are to believe his love to have been of that pure, unsubstantial, Platonic cast he depicted, or rather of that mixture of gallantry and voluptuousness, of devotion and extravagance, which was called love among the knights and troubadours of his age.

I shall not, however, go so far in my doubts as to call the very existence of the fair lady in question, as some have done before me.

It seems indeed impossible not to admit that, whoever she might be, there was a Laura—that is, a woman so named, known as a reigning beauty of a court that could boast to have assembled all the proudest beauties of Europe—on whom, for a long time, indeed for his whole life, a

few intervals of innocent diversion and solace always excepted, all Petrarch's thoughts and faculties were absorbed and centered.

This passion, during its first stage, seemed so completely to overwhelm him, that he found no remedy against it but absence. In 1330, he followed the fortunes of his friend Jacopo Colonna, who had recently been raised to the Bishopric of Lombez, by the gratitude of the pope, in remuneration of his intrepid behaviour in Rome, to which we have before alluded.

He revisited Avignon in the following year, but soon left, bound on a short excursion to Paris, whence he crossed over to Flanders and a part of Germany. "He delighted," he said, "in visiting new lands, and studying manners and feelings in remote regions, to compare them with what he remembered of the land that gave him birth; and although he did visit many magnificent countries, the longer and farther he travelled the fonder and prouder he grew of his Italian name; as every country, if compared with Italy, appeared to be plunged into darkness and barbarism."

After a sojourn of several years in Avignon, where his voice began to assume a considerable ascendancy over the events of his age, listening to his fondness for classical antiquity, to his patriotism, and to his friendship for the Colonna, he sailed from Marseilles for Rome, where the enthusiasm that the remnants of the old Roman monuments, the temples, forums, and theatres of the City of Ruins raised in his heart, cannot be conceived or described by any one who does not, like Petrarch, live more in the past than the present.

Restored to Avignon, he purchased a cottage and garden in a secluded spot, which he had from his childhood been induced by his father, and, in after life, led by his choice to visit and revisit, and in which he had occasionally fixed his residence, previous to his journey to Rome.

This was the too famous solitude of Vaucluse, which I shall take good care not to describe, as there is hardly a human being who has not at least heard of "the favourite haunts of the poet of love, where the music of his sonnets and songs is still hovering on the balmy air, and the rivulets have learned to imitate the murmur of his sighs."

His fondness for retirement, however, and his all-absorbing passion for Laura, did not make him unmindful of fame.

He was then busy with his Latin poem, "Africa;" a few of the cantos were already in circulation, and the report of their excellencies was sufficient to call him to that distinction, to which he had scarcely dared to aspire in his youthful dreams of ambition—his coronation on the Capitol.

The custom of crowning poets, general among the ancients, had been recently established at the restoration of letters; and the same honour had been already conferred, early in the fourteenth century, on more than one poet and scholar, whose names as well as their crowns, in spite of the incorruptibility of their leaves, are now fading and mouldering beneath the dust of their tombs.

But, at the crowning of Petrarch, it was the poet who honoured the laurel; and though we would not take upon ourselves to assert that Petrarch did not manage, through the medium of his friends, to obtain his intent, yet the very fact of two letters being contemporaneously sent to him for that purpose, the one from the Roman senate, the other from the chancellor of the university of Paris, (an Italian and one of his friends,) is sufficient to prove that he had only to express the slightest wish to be sure that the noblest of the learned corporations of Europe would strive to secure that honour for themselves.

His classical and patriotic predilections and the insinuations of Cardinal Colonna, having decided him in favour of

the Roman invitation, he landed at Naples early in 1341, where King Robert of Anjou was on the look-out for his arrival.

Robert was the third of the successors of Charles of Anjou, and was the wisest and most accomplished monarch of that dynasty. He had, in his youth, pursued the career of arms and politics, with more ardour and ambition than skill or success. He was now, in his decline, entirely engrossed by the more genial pursuits of the arts of peace. Surrounded with books and scholars at home and abroad, opening schools and libraries all over his states, encouraging and enlarging the university of Naples, which had languished since it was first founded under the auspices of the Emperor Frederic II. nearly a century before, he embellished his throne with all the lustre that letters and arts can confer upon a court.

It could hardly be expected that so liberal a prince—the Solomon of his age, as Boccaccio styled him—should remain indifferent to the glory of Petrarch. He had, in fact, long since entered into correspondence with him, and consulted him on matters of the highest moment, through the kind mediation of Dionysius de Robertis, a celebrated orator, poet, philosopher, theologian, astrologer; a scholar, in fine, according to the ideas of the age, a native of Florence, but likewise, in accordance with the manners of the age, wandering all his life in quest of knowledge, with whom Petrarch had been on terms of cordial intimacy during his stay in Paris. It was, without doubt, to King Robert and to this generous friend that Petrarch owed the invitation of the Roman senate; and through a sentiment of—perhaps in some degree affected—modesty, he repaired to the court of Naples with a view to undergo a thorough examination by the king himself, from which it might appear how far he was indeed entitled by his learning to the honour that awaited him. The experiment lasted three days, and was open to the public; it turned

upon all the topics that constituted the *scibile* of the age.

Some of the cantos of the poem "Africa" were read by the bard to his patron, who was so delighted with it, that he requested to receive the dedication of the poem whenever it should be drawn to a close. Petrarch promised it, and kept his word, though neither did the good king live, nor did he himself persevere, to see the end of the work; for incomplete the work did certainly remain, and there is no doubt that its author never thought of giving it the last finish, and was even said to have left an order—probably in imitation of Virgil—that the poem should, after his death, be consigned to the flames—an order which he well knew never would, and, considering the many copies already in circulation, never could be executed.

The honours that the Neapolitan monarch and his court bestowed upon the candidate during the period of trial, could be only eclipsed by the splendour and magnificence of his reception at Rome.

Dressed in royal garb—King Robert having presented him with his own robe—surrounded with all the pomp and pageant of royalty, Petrarch reached the eternal city, which, decked with all the majesty of olden times, poured forth, in one mass, to meet him. Deafened by the shouts and plaudits of that always fierce and stormy multitude, he rode to the Capitol, where the senator, his friend, Orso dell' Anguillara, was, with his own hand, to perform the solemn ceremony. Twelve young patricians in white garments followed, proclaiming the glory of the bard, and singing his verses. The Colonna, and the proudest Roman families, marched in his suite. The discords of those haughty barons seemed, for a moment, suspended—the chains that pressed upon the people relaxed—and the great metropolis assumed its ancient character of grandeur for a scene that was never before or after equalled in Italy.

This far-famed solemnity took place on Easter-day, April 8th, 1340.

The poet was then in his thirty-seventh year, and his countenance, beaming with inspiration, preserved still so much of its soft and rather feminine beauty, as to conciliate the suffrages of that part of the spectators who had no better test than those external advantages by which to estimate his worth.

It cannot be denied that the Italians, even of the lowest classes, excel every other people in Europe in the instinctive awe which they seem to feel in the presence of genius, and that nowhere does eminent talent meet with more unanimous and enthusiastic homage than in Italy, where, without remounting to happier ages, it may well be remembered how, even in our time, the arrival of Byron and Scott in any of the large towns throughout the country was an event calculated to produce a sensation certainly not inferior to what we have seen excited by the visit of a Russian prince among the best circles of free-born Britons in London, or by the appearance of the Prince of Joinville at a public ball among the republicans of New York.

Immediately after the ceremony, Petrarch started for Avignon, where he longed to lay his laurel wreath at the feet of that proud beauty, for whose sake alone that crown seemed to have any value in his eyes. He travelled, however, by land, probably that he might enjoy a triumphant march through Italy; and having put up for a few days at the court of Azzo da Correggio, Lord of Parma, he, by his earnest instances, deviated from his former purpose, and was gradually induced to choose his residence on the sunny side of the Alps.

Azzo was the son of Giberto da Correggio, who had usurped, and with various vicissitudes held, the supreme authority in Parma from 1295 to 1313. His son, who had shared his father's fortunes and reverses, had been

called to re-assume, in 1321, the sovereignty of Parma, which he contrived to secure in his grasp by the same arts and policy that had secured his father's success; by adroitly shifting from the Guelph to the Ghibeline party, by rousing and fomenting civil discords and jealousies, and by all the resources of an easy conscience and accommodating faith*.

Azzo had to struggle especially against two noble antagonists, Piero and Marsilio, brothers de Rossi, the first especially considered as the most valiant and accomplished knight, and the ablest general in Italy. There had been in 1335 a brief suspension of hostilities, and the contest had been brought before the supreme tribunal of Pope Benedict XII. in Avignon, when Petrarch, for the first time and the last, brushing up what he still remembered of his legal studies, donned a barrister's gown, and pleaded the cause of Azzo, his friend, with so much zeal and unction, as could easily prove that he might have claimed the best title to the name of the most eloquent orator, had he not preferred the glory of the greatest poet of his age.

It was this important service that Azzo da Correggio, a grateful, but in every other respect, an unworthy friend of Petrarch, intended to remunerate, when, by pressing invitations, and by some ecclesiastical dignities which he caused to be conferred upon him, he attached the laureate poet to his court. Petrarch built in Parma a house, which is still to be seen standing, and sought in the neighbourhood a silent, humble hermitage in the solitude of *Selva*

* The Correggio were of Lombard descent. They were Lords of Correggio in A.D. 1009. They settled at Parma, 1203. Azzo da Correggio sold the sovereignty of Parma to Obizzo of Este, in 1344. The family continued at Correggio till 1517, when the direct line became extinct. A younger branch flourished at Correggio from 1616 to 1631. They all ended in 1711. The Rossi of Parma became first known in 1100; were created Counts of San Secondo, 1300; extinct, 1825.

Piana, which he called his Cisalpine Parnassus, in opposition to his Transalpine Parnassus of Vacluse.

To Vacluse, however, and to his much-dreaded no less than much-cherished Avignon, the course of political events was soon to drive him once more.

Benedict XII. was dead, and Clement VI. had been raised to the pontificate*. The Roman senate sent a deputation charged with the mission of complimenting the new pope, and soliciting his return to his Italian metropolis. Petrarch, now decorated with the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship, was invited to join the deputies, among whom he found his friend, the too famous Cola da Rienzi, whom he had first seen in Rome at the epoch of his coronation. The deputation failed; but the liberal, though unprincipled pontiff, did not fail to honour and reward the two friends who had by turns assumed the office of spokesmen; and Petrarch, enriched by new ecclesiastical sinecures, cast his anchor once more in Avignon.

His excellent friend, King Robert, had, meanwhile, died at Naples†, and his sceptre had fallen into the tender and inexperienced hands of that more wretched than guilty, "more sinned against than sinning," Joan of Naples, the Mary Stuart of Italy. Petrarch, sent to the court of Joan by Pope Clement on a mission in which he but poorly succeeded, returned disappointed and exhausted to his Cisalpine Parnassus in Parma.

There he was involved in all the horrors and tumults of a ruthless war, kindled by the intrigues and perfidies of Azzo da Correggio, who had bartered his sovereignty of Parma to the Visconti of Milan and the Este of Ferrara, defrauding both with every kind of perjury, and robbing his own brothers of their share in the bargain. Released from the trances of terror and suspense, into which the

* A.D. 1342.

† A.D. 1343.

distracted state of Lombardy had plunged him, he crossed the Alps, and arrived safe in Avignon, though not without infinite dangers and hairbreadth escapes.

But the habit of wandering had become in him a second nature, and he began now to shift his residence, without any plausible reason, as if obeying the impulse of an irresistible necessity.

In the course of that same year he was in Parma once more, where not having found his patron, Azzo da Correggio, who, now a dethroned and banished prince, had taken shelter in Verona, to Verona he directed his course. There reigned in Verona, in those days, Mastino II., nephew of Cane della Scala, who had inherited the valour and ambition, but not the splendour and magnanimity, of his predecessor. The name of this Mastino is disgraced by the record of awful crimes; and the hand which he probably stretched to the roaming poet was stained with the blood of his nephew, an archbishop, whom he had, only a few years before, slain on the threshold of the sanctuary. The crimes of stabbing and poisoning were ever since perpetuated in this reprobate family of the Scaligeri, who, as one of their biographers observes, "perished like a race of mad *dogs* and *mastiffs*, tearing each other to pieces, with the very rage of the animals from which they seemed so fond of borrowing their names."*

The sojourn of Petrarch in Verona was, however, of the shortest duration.

Early in 1346, he is found once more in his solitude of Vacluse, from whence he hardly ever stirred, until he was roused, in the following year, by an unexpected event that reawakened all his predilections for Italy.

The brilliant though ephemeral episode of his friend

* The origin of Scaligeri, or Lords della Scala, is involved in obscurity. Mastino della Scala was chief magistrate in Verona in 1260. The family became extinct, 1598.

Rienzi, the last of the tribunes, was then acting at Rome. How egregiously Petrarch, as well as the soberest spirits of the age, plunged into the tribune's dreams and illusions, we need not repeat. A new light and interest have been recently thrown on the subject, and all the details of that momentous revolution have been with great force at least, if not always with impartiality and discernment, laid before the English readers, in one of those works of fiction that assume, in our days, the office of history.

Not satisfied with encouraging the tribune's efforts by his epistles and exhortations, or with warmly advocating his friend's cause at the court of Avignon, where Rienzi could not fail to have bitter opponents, Petrarch resolved to join him at Rome, and once more bade adieu to Avignon.

The pope offered him the office of Apostolical secretary—his friends gathered around him in sorrow and tears—Cardinal Colonna reproached him with levity and ingratitude—Laura, as if aware that they parted for ever, cast a fond, lingering glance after him, and turned pale—he felt, in short, as if his heart were torn from him as he left,—but he left.

Had Petrarch's sound judgment and his unerring sense of equity been opportunely associated with the prestige of Rienzi's eloquence and enthusiasm—had the poet thrown his laurel in the balance of the destinies of Italy—no man can ascertain what might have proved the final result of that abortive attempt; for we can have no doubt that Rome and Italy were then not quite ripe for the yoke of servitude, and that, on the other hand, they were too sadly distracted by factions to enjoy the blessings of liberty, and abide under the empire of the laws.

How it might have happened had Petrarch arrived in time, certain it is that nothing awaited him in Italy but disappointment and woe.

No sooner had he landed at Genoa, than he heard of the

massacre of the Colonna and all the rest of the Roman nobility. The infatuated tribune assumed the tone and manners of an absolute dictator, and rushed on with the inconsiderate violence of a man drunk with prosperity. The multitude soon recovered from their blind fanaticism, and broke their idol with as much precipitation as they had raised him on their altars.

Laying aside his projected journey to Rome, the poet wandered all the rest of that year between Verona, Padua, and Parma.

The following year, 1348, arose in darkness and gloom.

Bereft already of some of his bosom friends, (namely, of Dionysius de Robertis, and of Jacopo Colonna, the bishop of Lombez, 1344,) humbled by the downfall of long-cherished hopes, alarmed by violent earthquakes and other public calamities, his inborn timidity awakened by a thousand ominous presentiments—for, like many a great man of antiquity, he believed himself privileged with the forewarnings of Heaven—he was witnessing the ravages that the too famous pestilence of 1348 was carrying on under his eyes, when tidings upon tidings reached him of his irreparable losses in Avignon: Cardinal Colonna and—Laura.

Laura died suddenly on the 6th of April, in the same month, day, and hour in which Petrarch had seen her, for the first time, in the church of St. Claire, in Avignon, and twenty-one years after that remarkable event.

After her death, Petrarch, who was doomed to survive her twenty-six years, could hardly find rest any where.

From Parma, where the mortal announcement found him, he started again for Verona, and thence for Mantua. At Mantua, he was hospitably received by Louis of Gonzaga, one of that family who, avenging the outrage offered to a lady of their name, by the murder of Passerino Bonacassi, Lord of Mantua, had, in 1328, snatched from him

the sceptre of that city, which remained in their hands till the middle of the eighteenth century.

From Mantua Petrarch travelled to Parma, whence, in 1350, he undertook a pilgrimage to Rome on the recurrence of the Jubilee. He was waited upon by Giovanni Boccaccio, his friend, on his passage through Florence, and was greeted with the warmest reception in Arezzo at his return, where he was shown the very house he was born in, preserved as a holy shrine by public veneration, and pointed out to strangers as the pride of the city.

Continuing his journey to the northward, Petrarch returned to Padua, where he found the court and city plunged into mourning by the perpetration of a domestic tragedy.

Padua obeyed, since the beginning of the fourteenth century, the rule of the lords of Carrara. Jacopo, second of that name, who had, in 1345, opened his way to the throne through treason and murder, had just fallen himself a victim to the vengeance of his nephews. Francesco da Carrara, who had already commenced his reign by confining his cousin and uncle in a dungeon, where they both found their death, hastened to assure Petrarch that he was no less welcome to the court of Padua than he ever had been under his predecessor*.

Florence, meanwhile, acknowledging too late, and repenting her injustice towards the greatest of her citizens, Dante, and raising, as it were by way of atonement, altars in her schools to his memory, had revoked the decree of banishment and confiscation passed against Petracco and

* The Carrara were probably of Northern descent. Known as early as A.D. 970; Lords of Carrara, 1027. The Paduans demolish their castle, 1200. The Carrara become citizens of Padua; they usurp the sovereignty of that city, 1318—1338. Defeated and destroyed by the Venetians, 1406. A branch of the family, the Marchesi Pappafava, still flourish at Padua.

his family, and solicited—Boccaccio himself being charged with the mission—the return of Petrarch, inviting him to the direction of her newly established university.

Petrarch crossed over to Avignon.

He continued in Avignon to enjoy credit and favour till the death of Clement VI., when, in 1353, having been held in dread and mistrust by the new pope, Innocent VI., a rude, illiterate Frenchman, who dreaded, in the poet, an adept in witchcraft, as Virgil, said the good pope, had been before him, Petrarch recrossed the Alps, and repaired to the court of the Visconti at Milan.

The grandeur of the Visconti * had been laid on a solid basis, ever since Otho, Archbishop of Milan, a warlike prelate of that family, had, by several discomfitures, dispersed the Guelph de la Torre in 1277. Their power had, notwithstanding some severe checks, been always on the increase in consequence of the ascendancy of the superior valour of Matteo and Azzo, and through the crafty and unscrupulous ambition of Luchino Visconti. This last having been poisoned by his wife in 1349, the sceptre had fallen into the hands of the Archbishop Giovanni Visconti, who wielded it with more than priestly hands.

This proud and cunning prelate, who united to the lordly titles of his family the supreme ecclesiastical dignity of the state, who had received the legates of the pope, brandishing a crozier in his left hand and a sword in the other, giving them to understand that he was ready to support his rights with either, was now without the shade of a rival among the most eminent Ghibeline leaders †. Already Parma and Bologna, Genoa and Pisa, had, either under the title of alliance or patronage, been added to the

* The Visconti, unknown at Milan before A.D. 1037. Eriprando already bore, at that period, the title of *Viscount*. Otho, his successor, led the Milanese to the first crusade, 1099; saved Henry V.'s life at his coronation, in Rome, 1111. Several branches of the Visconti still in existence.

† A.D. 1352.

ample heritage of his fathers ; even the republic of Florence was threatened with imminent ruin.

Such was the prince at whose court Petrarch was, by the most urgent entreaties, compelled to reside ; nor had he sooner consented to be his guest, than the archbishop created him his ambassador, and despatched him to Venice to bring about a cessation of hostilities between that republic and Genoa.

Venice and Genoa, after the downfall of the maritime power of Pisa in 1284, disputed, rather than divided, the empire of the sea. The two emulous republics had already, in many a naval encounter, stained the Mediterranean and the Black Sea with the best of their blood. The pride of Venice had been sorely humbled at Corzuola in 1288 ; but the strife had lately broken open afresh, and Paganino Doria, one of the many heroes of that formidable name, was measuring his forces against Nicolo Pisani, the Venetian admiral, with various success.

Genoa had then given the supreme power of the state to the Archbishop of Milan ; and Petrarch, who, in all these brotherly feuds, never failed to act the part of universal peacemaker, and who had already in vain exhorted the two inimical parties to a reconciliation, appeared now at Venice, bound to the same purpose, invested with a new official character, true to the same mission to which he seemed so eminently appointed by Heaven, invariably turning his credit and ascendancy to what he believed to be the cause of justice and humanity.

There ruled then at Venice the doge Andrea Dandolo, than whose name none sounded more high and glorious in Italy—one of the greatest warriors and statesmen, as well as the first historiographer of his country. An admirer as he was of Petrarch's learning and genius, and long since numbered among his most intimate friends, Dandolo continued, however, inexorable in his hostile designs against Genoa. The ambassador was courted and

honoured; but his mediation was received with a levity little short of raillery and contempt, and the struggle was carried on with mutual inveteracy. The fortune of Doria and Genoa prevailed. Venice, exhausted by repeated disasters, was compelled to sue for peace; and it was granted on such hard terms, that the generous heart of the doge broke under the disgrace of his country, and—such was then Italian patriotism—died of sorrow ere he signed the treaty*.

In the following year, ere Venice had recovered from these external calamities, she was threatened with final destruction by the conspiracy of her new doge, Marino Faliero. But that republic had found its palladium in the disinterested patriotism of its permanent aristocracy, who, after the closing of the grand council in 1297, had given the government that steadiness and vitality that preserved it among the wrecks of all Italian States, almost to our days.

The war of Chiozza, which followed soon after† and nearly brought Venice to the very brink of ruin, ended by strengthening her power and securing her prosperity.

The Archbishop of Milan had, meanwhile, suddenly died, (October, 1354,) and his three nephews, Matteo, Bernabò, and Galeazzo, divided his vast states between them. Matteo soon perished, most probably by the hands of his brothers, and the three shares were thus reduced to two. Petrarch continued to enjoy the same hospitality at the court of Galeazzo, the mildest and most accom-

* War of the Bosphorus, Nicolo Pisani defeated by Paganino Doria, February 13, 1352.—New Conquests of Doria on the coast of Morea, November 13, 1354.

† War of Chiozza.—Vittor Pisani defeated at Pola, by Luciano Doria, and thrown into prison by the order of the Senate, May 29, 1379.—Taking of Chiozza by Pietro Doria, who was bent on the utter extermination of Venice, August 6.—Vittor Pisani restores the wavering spirits of his countrymen.—Carlo Zeno comes to the rescue of the besieged city. The Genoese are compelled to surrender, June 1380.

plished of the two brothers ; and who, after Petrarch's suggestion, was the founder of the university of Pavia.

The Visconti seemed to have bound fortune to their chariot. Allied to the royal houses of England and France, they were enabled to brave the cowardly Cæsars, who were now disgracing the sceptre of Germany. To Henry VII., who died in Italy in 1313, had succeeded Louis IV. of Bavařia, who, after betraying friends and enemies in his invasion of 1327, had carried along with him, in his retreat, the gold and execration of Italy. Nor had the descent of John of Bohemia, in 1333, any more fortunate result, notwithstanding the valour and courtesy of that monarch, and the enthusiasm of the Italians for him. It was now the turn of his son Charles IV., who, having assumed the imperial purple in 1347, made also his attempt upon Italy in 1354. He appeared on the Alps unarmed and unattended, reckoning, like all his predecessors, on Italian discords and jealousies. The Lombard and Tuscan lords rallied, in fact, around his standard ; but, after having rewarded them by every manner of extortion and treachery, he hurried back to Germany, leaving behind him plague, famine, and utter desolation, wherever he passed.

This emperor was also one of Petrarch's illustrious friends. The poet had seen him while he was still only Charles of Luxemburg, in 1346, in Avignon, where the gallant prince had, in his presence and before the whole court, kissed his Laura's forehead and eyes, "in so sweet a manner," says the poet, "that he was seized with envy at the sight." Petrarch had afterwards written to the emperor, at his accession, a long, eloquent Latin epistle, inviting him, who by his intimacy with the pope was best calculated to conciliate the suffrages of Guelph and Ghibeline, to cross the Alps, for the pacification of Italy. That letter remained, for some unaccountable reason, for three years unanswered ; but Petrarch, nothing discou-

raged, forwarded a second exhortation in 1354; which, backed as it was by splendid offers of Venetian gold, prevailed, as we have said, upon the emperor, and induced him to take a journey of which Italy paid so dearly the expenses.

Surrendering to the emperor's bidding, Petrarch met him at Mantua, and continued for several weeks his guest and intimate counsellor. But the differences that soon arose between Charles and the Visconti prevented the poet from accompanying the emperor to Rome, where he was desired to honour, by his attendance, the ceremony of his coronation. Petrarch parted with Charles at Placentia, and joined his patron at Milan.

In the following year, 1356, the poet ambassador was charged with a mission to Germany to reconcile the good will of the emperor, who, having now retreated to Germany, still menaced the Visconti and Italy with a second invasion. Again, in 1360, he crossed the Alps, on his way to the court of King John of France, to congratulate him on his deliverance from English captivity. The French king and the German emperor, as well as indeed every prince who ever saw or heard of Petrarch, strove by splendid offers to lay the strongest temptations in the path of the ambassador to prevent his return. But he had, by this time, too many arguments of attachment to his own Italy, to be longer detained by any solicitation from abroad.

It is but to do justice to Petrarch's memory to say, that the constant favour of the great never dazzled his judgment with a frivolous fondness for pomp or luxury. He had made fame his idol—he wished for no distinction but what was attached to his name—he aspired to no power but what arose from his popularity. Thus, wearied with the splendour of the gay court of Galeazzo, he sought his retreat in a small villa near the Adda, three miles from Milan, which (as he was pleased to do with his

own and his best friends' name, recasting them so as to give them the sound of Greek and Roman antiquity)—he designated under the classical name of *Linternum*, where he buried himself among his books, and received the visits of lords and monarchs with a plainness and frugality which he well knew made a happy contrast with the lustre and prestige of his name.

A dearer, perhaps, though a humbler visit, he received in 1359, in the person of his early friend Giovanni Boccaccio, with whom he had never ceased to entertain a warm, not less than a learned correspondence, ever since their first meeting at the court of King Robert in Naples, at the epoch of his coronation.

The intimacy of these two illustrious men of letters, who moved during their life in two far different orbits, but whose merits are, in the eyes of posterity, more than fairly balanced, has a peculiar charm for us, when we think of the acrimony and inveteracy of literary dissensions in the following ages.

Boccaccio, the plain citizen of a commercial republic, looked up with a feeling of deference to Petrarch, the favourite of tyrants and popes, and bowed before the laurel that shaded his brows. But his very modesty and unconsciousness of his own powers, his unaffected diffidence, his disinterested attachment, and a conformity of tastes and pursuits, won the good will of the more aspiring mind of the poet of Laura, whose fault was rather excess than lack of warmth and cordiality in his intercourse with his familiars.

The interchange of books and manuscripts, the joy with which they communicated to each other every new discovery of classical works as a subject of common triumph, the kind advices and remonstrances of which they were liberal to each other, and even the occasional subventions with which Petrarch ran to the rescue of his friend when harassed by pecuniary difficulties, had in-

cessantly contributed to strengthen their union, and render them necessary to each other.

There was only one point in which the two friends found each other often at variance, and on which the upright, unyielding conduct of the good republican storyteller baffled the specious eloquence and the artful caressing manners of the court poet; and that was the very circumstance of his being a court poet, of his living under the patronage of such hideous tyrants as Bernabò and Galeazzo Visconti, and his residing with the members of a family who, from their first rise, had never ceased to lay every kind of snare against the tranquillity of his (Boccaccio's) beloved Florentine republic, and to conspire with its most inveterate Italian or foreign adversaries to its destruction.

Boccaccio saw likewise with pain, that the name of the poet who had been for him "the first light to shoot upon his mind," whose glory he had, by his exertions, restored in Florence—the name of Dante gave visible uneasiness to the jealous vanity of Petrarch, who had, however, the least occasion in the world to envy the reputation of any man, dead or living. Petrarch shrank and smarted under the alleged grievances, and could ill withstand the frankness and plainness of his inexorable monitor. On these occurrences he had recourse rather to the arts of persuasion than conviction. He overwhelmed his friend's judgment by the expansion of ardent, irresistible sympathies; he silenced him by the same arguments which he, doubtless, employed to lay his own conscience at rest.

War, plague, and famine, in those ages inseparable scourges, meanwhile frightened the poet from his humble rural retreat. Bands of disorderly soldiers, chiefly composed of foreign adventurers, French, German, and English, after passing from the service of one prince to another, not unfrequently betraying, robbing, and plundering their employers—in time of peace, carried on war

on their own account, and laid waste the whole country with appalling executions. Styling themselves "enemies of God, of mercy and pity," declaring war "to all the world," these leaders of robbers, whose mad presumption was hardly inferior to their brutal ferocity, began to anticipate the day in which the fairest of countries was hopelessly to lie at their mercy. The Italians who, obeying the impulse of a precocious civilisation, and their eagerness for less sanguinary pursuits, had too hastily laid down their sword, neglected and given up the trade of arms to those ultramontane ruffians, who had nothing but their own blood to traffic upon, began now to feel the necessity of providing for their own defence.

It went deep and bitter to Petrarch's sensitive soul to witness the calamities of his ravaged country. His voice was raised, and not ineffectually, to rescue Italy from such barbarous hands.

The Milanese in 1339, and the Florentines in 1348, sent out bands of armed citizens, before whom the foreign marauders yielded ground, without daring to await their encounter; until at last, in 1378, under the patronage of Giovan Galeazzo Visconti, Alberigo di Barbiano gave origin to those companies of Italian men at arms (*compagnie di ventura*) by whom the savage northerners were utterly driven out of the land.

Thus was, only a few years after his death, Petrarch's prophecy fully accomplished, when he sang, under the influence of a holy inspiration,

"Virtue 'gainst brutal rage
Shall rise in arms, and short shall be the test;
For of the valour of a happier age
Some sparks still glow within th' Italian breast."

One of Petrarch's most favourite schemes, to which he turned his most strenuous exertions during the whole of his life, on which he laid his best hopes for a prompt cessa-

tion of evil in Italy, and which he lived to see accomplished at last, was the reinstalment of the papal see in the metropolis of Christendom.

Rome was then afflicted, as it had always been for several centuries, by the feuds and rivalries of two or three noble houses, the Savelli, Orsini, and Colonna, who, raised to power and wealth by the successive favour of the popes of their respective families, had turned the city and country into a vast field of carnage and devastation.

It was the opinion of Petrarch, as well as of many of the most sober writers and thinkers of that age, that such a state of disorder and anarchy was principally owing to what they called the exile of the Christian church in Avignon, and on this persuasion he spared no remonstrance or entreaty to hasten its recall. This was, at the best, a gratuitous assertion, and rather indifferently sanctioned by previous experience; since Rome and Italy were hardly ever afflicted by any calamity that could not be demonstrated to have had a pope at the bottom; and since those very factions of Colonna and Orsini were but the natural result of the first examples of papal *Nepotism* given by Nicolas III. and IV.—but it seemed then to be an essential tenet of national creed, that if there was to be a religion in the world, it must have its chief seat in Rome; and if there must be a pope, he must of necessity be an Italian.

Peace be with the memory of Petrarch!

For, if no one can in our days doubt the rectitude of his motives, it may be permitted at least to express some regret that a poet should not equally be a prophet, and should not have had sufficient foresight to perceive that he was curing a great evil by another still greater; and that if the Colonna and Orsini could, by some happy turn of vicissitudes, be done away with—as the ephemeral revolution of Rienzi had nearly succeeded in proving—five centuries of hard-won experience would hardly be sufficient for Italy to rid herself of bad popes.

Petrarch's remonstrances, which had fallen unheeded at the foot of the papal throne, during the pontificate of John XXII., of Benedict XII., and Clement VI., were more favourably listened to by the new pope, Urban V., who was raised to the supreme dignity of the church in 1366. He received the poet's Latin exhortatory epistle with due regard and admiration; and, after having lingered for a few months on his journey, he made his solemn entry into Rome in October 1367, where he soon received the most enthusiastic felicitations of Petrarch, who thus saw his long-protracted hopes finally crowned with success.

But no sooner was Urban restored to the august seat of his predecessors, than, plunging as blindly as any of them ever did into the arena of Italian politics, he rallied the Guelphs around his standard, and declared war against the Visconti.

The controversy was soon complicated by the descent of the Emperor Charles IV., who reaped no more honour from this than from his former invasion. Thence ensued one of those long and ruthless wars, of which Italy had to witness but too many at every new generation; at the end of which the pope, scared out of his seat by the brutal but unyielding ferocity of the Visconti, was glad to make his escape back to Avignon, where he soon died of disappointment and weariness*.

Petrarch during this interval, never ceased to shift his residence from Pavia to Padua, and from Padua to Venice, either flying before the sudden onset of an unruly soldiery, and the not less dreaded ravages of contagious diseases, or in vain attempts to comply with the wishes of Urban, who invited him to his court in Avignon and Rome.

He had found, in Venice, a home in the house of Francesco da Brossano, a Milanese gentleman, to whom he had married his natural daughter Francesca, born of a clan-

* A.D. 1370.

destine intercourse he had had with an obscure person in Avignon—a star of the second magnitude, it appears, but a fond, affectionate being, who, prodigal to the poet of such earthly bliss as was in her power to bestow, consoled him for all he had to endure from the coldness and inflexibility of Laura. Giovanni, another of his sons issuing from the same union, on whom the poet had lavished his more than paternal cares, after having nearly broken his father's heart by his disorderly demeanour, had been carried off by the pestilence in 1361. Death was thus cutting off all objects on which the poet's affection, in his old age, could rest for support; and his day was lingeringly setting, clouded by bereavement and loneliness at heart, shrinking and withering, void and sick in his bosom. Meanwhile, exhausted by age and infirmities, he felt once more the want of solitude and repose; and, hardly recovering from a severe illness which had suddenly attacked him at Ferrara, sighing as he always did for the free air of the country, he chose his dwelling in the vicinity of Arqua on the Euganean hills, at the distance of twelve miles from Padua.

From this tranquil sojourn he was, however, removed once more on his last mission to the republic of Venice, whither he was sent as an ambassador of his benefactor, Francesco da Carrara, who had already (in 1372) commenced against the queen of the Adriatic that war which he carried on, with short intervals of truce, and with various vicissitudes, until it ended with the total destruction of his whole race in 1406.

Petrarch, however, had the merit of bringing about a suspension of hostilities between the two belligerent powers in 1373. He was well known and revered in Venice, where he had, in 1362, presented the senate with his precious collection of manuscripts. Venice had, two years afterwards, through his mediation, obtained from the Visconti the services of their best general, Luchino dal Verme, under whose guidance the arms of the republic had ef-

fecting the conquest of Candia *. A lofty seat was, on every solemn occasion, reserved to him by the right side of the doge; the republic conferring on him, though nothing in Venice but a private man, the highest honours of the state; and revering in him, as one of his biographers justly observes, "the representative of a higher power—the supreme chief—the doge of the republic of letters."

The truce being concluded, he journeyed back to his Euganean solitude, where he was one morning (July 18, 1374) found by his attendants dead in his chair, his head leaning on his desk, apparently struck by apoplexy while engaged with one of his books, dying thus the death of a scholar at the advanced age of seventy.

The life of Petrarch and his works do not always perfectly harmonise.

As a writer, Petrarch was not known to have ever disguised truth for any personal danger or interest. A guest and favourite of the Avignonese popes, he uttered the severest reproofs against the vices and infamies of their court. A friend and familiar of the Lombard tyrants, his voice was ever raised for his country, and he dared alone to utter his cry of "Peace, peace, peace!" A creature of the Colonna, he applauded the efforts of Rienzi, which ended with the extermination of that family.

Italy, truth, and humanity, were dearer to him than his dearest friends.

But why needed he to be the guest of popes, and minion of tyrants? Why did he continue a familiar with the oppressor, while his heart was bleeding for the oppressed?

Petrarch was a virtuous man, but he was not a hero; his was a candid and generous, but not equally a rigid and steady character. To all his eminent qualities one was wanting, the noblest attribute of man—courage. He gave, in his lifetime, several proofs of that nervous pusillanimity which is but too often inborn in the temperament of men

* A.D. 1364.

of letters. Of this class of beings Petrarch was the first type. It is now fashionably observed, that men of letters are a kind of middle creatures between man and woman. Petrarch wrote like a man, and acted like a woman. Popes, emperors, and tyrants had for him the regards to which a woman is entitled; and he who, according to his own expressions, feared those whom he loved, was seduced by the arts which generally decide a woman's fate—flattery and caresses.

He was disinterested and frugal; he despised wealth, or lavished it upon his friends, whom he always loved with unexampled fidelity. His poem, "Africa," was dedicated to King Robert when dead: his book, "*De Remediis utriusque Fortunæ*," to Azzo da Correggio, when a fugitive and proscribed. He was exempt from ambition, and shunned honours, dignities, and all the cares of public life; but he was not equally inaccessible to vanity, nor to that petty jealousy and spitefulness so highly derogating from a character of true greatness. He mistook public opinion for glory—he purchased the applause of his age at the expense of the censure of all the following.

The honours that awaited him wherever he moved dazzled his judgment; the joy that his appearance roused, the halo that his laurel spread round his head, did not allow him to see objects in their real state; and such was then indeed the state of things, as to render his path exceedingly arduous and perilous. The differences between Guelphs and Ghibelines became more and more complicated. Petrarch was in Rome and Avignon a Guelph; he was a Ghibeline at Milan, Padua, and Parma; as a champion of humanity, he was both; as a patriot, neither.

Petrarch was not the man of his age.

Had he been born earlier, in the age of Augustus—or later, in the days of Leo X., his life might have been spent in singing the glories of his country, and the blessings of liberty, whilst selling his verses to his liberal Mæcenæ.

But the age he lived in was yet an age of struggle and trial. The elements of good and evil were still in conflict, and the fate of the day hung still in suspense. In an age in which the mind was rapidly gaining its ascendancy over force, He was the Mind. But he chose to make himself harmless and impotent. He ceased to be feared, as soon as it was known how easily he could be propitiated. His bitterest invectives never gained him an enemy. He was treated as a shrew, whose humour was indulged, and to whom was granted the privilege of scolding by those who knew that he would end by conniving when his fits of displeasure were over—while he, satisfied with his eloquent protestations, lived with the most loathsome despots on such terms of intimacy as if he had actually been a partaker of iniquity.

He lived long enough, as we have said, to be sadly undeceived of all worldly illusions; and his end was embittered by an indefinite dissatisfaction with himself and the world, by a restlessness or repining, a querulousness, bordering on misanthropy and remorse. It seemed as if all the faults of his age were laid to the charge of his conscience, and as if the mission which Heaven imposes upon a superior mind had been by him, through blind condescension, wilfully foregone.

The Latin works of Petrarch have been of late sought with great avidity, as historical documents of his age and character. But as literary productions they are irrevocably exploded. A great name is not sufficient to secure immortality to all works attached to it. Fame sails on a fragile vessel across a stormy sea. Before she reaches the shore, a great part of the cargo has gone overboard*.

* Petrarch's Latin works—"De Remediis utriusque Fortunæ"—"Rerum memorandarum, libri IV."—"Vitæ Virorum illustrium"—"De Otio religiosarum"—"De Republicâ optime administrandâ"—"Africa"—"Eclogæ," etc., etc. Italian works—"Rime"—"Trionfi." First complete edition of his works, Basle, 1581, fol.

The reasons why Petrarch so fondly adhered to the Latin are obvious. The modern dialects did not yet enjoy sufficient credit to gratify his unbounded thirst for fame. Flourishing so many years after Dante, he was not aware of the revolution Dante had operated. What he wrote in Italian, in the love-dreams of his youth, he regarded as a juvenile performance. He was, indeed, induced by universal applause to give them a higher finish in after age; still, as he aimed at the suffrages, not only of Italy, but of the whole world, he wrote accordingly in what was still the language of learning all over the world.

This language he had, by his strenuous exertions, most powerfully contributed to restore to its glory. The reviver and reformer of classicism, he encouraged and directed the researches of all the scholars of Europe. He spared no labour nor expense to bring into light the buried treasures of antiquity. The discoveries by which Italy undid the work of the middle ages, were conducted under his auspices.

But, by continual dealing with the dead, Petrarch brought himself back to their age. He wrote and lived as a contemporary of Virgil and Cicero. Not satisfied with having rescued their works from oblivion, he reproduced them in his writings, as if anxious to provide by his copies against the chances of a future dispersion of the originals. Happily, in his youth, he had loved, and as Latin is but an awkward language for love-making, he had recourse to the style of the troubadours of Provence and Italy, which was then the language of love.

Petrarch can therefore hardly lay any claim to originality. Before him, Dante, Guitton d'Arezzo, and Cino da Pistoia, had given the love poems of the troubadours a more intellectual and Platonic turn of sentiment. He only excelled his predecessors in his skill in composition, in his gentle and tender ingenuity of pathos, in his sweetness, purity, and elegance of style.

Petrarch sang all his life, without ever fully depicting his love.

His verses do not appear to be the warm immediate expression of overflowing passion, but the result of long meditation and reverie—the reaction of the mind over the tumultuous workings of the heart.

Whatever may be thought of the real nature of his indefinable affection in real life, certain it is that it appears in his poetry no longer as a wasting and preying flame, but as a beacon of immortal light, blazing with a calm beneficent lustre, and pointing to the sky. It is no torrent, dashing from rock to rock, and roaring against all obstacles it meets on its way, but a pure stream on an even land, caressing the flowers that glitter on its banks, and gliding on unhurried and unreluctant.

It is not in his rhymes, therefore, that we must look for the transport or wildness of passion. We shall find there no love, but the reflection of love;—a melancholy, a religion, a mysticism, of which a few fugitive involuntary passages seem scarcely to ruffle the surface.

True, that love is too much deprived of all romance to be long interesting—true, that idol of Laura, and the altar raised in the heart of her lover, look, to us common mortals, as too abstract and indefinite a chimera—true, that eternal softness degenerates into something like languor and sameness; but, as it has been judiciously observed, “who would accuse the spring of monotony for the multitude of her flowers?” The impression of uniformity arises from our seeing those poems bound together in a large and indiscriminating collection. Each of those sonnets and songs has a little story attached to it, is in itself a little poem, a little romance, independent of all others, which had its own purpose to answer, and its little mission to fulfil. Warm as it sprang from the poet’s mind, it was transmitted to the hands of roaming troubadours, and wandered from castle to castle,

the delight of knights and ladies, to minister a new phraseology to the dictionary of love which that gallant and chivalrous age was sedulously compiling. Of that phraseology there was but too much in the verses of the poet of Laura; and all those refined, and affected, and false, and puerile images that chill the reader on the very moment of his warmest emotion, are not so much the fault of Petrarch as of that ingenious Provençal school to which he was proud to pertain.

Let us rather admire what exclusively and indisputably belong to him—the loveliness of his language, the melody, luxuriance, and spontaneousness of his verses, the flashes of his lyrical fire, the freshness and vividness of his colouring, by which his sonnets and songs preserve, after nearly five centuries, all the fragrance of an opening flower.

The idolatry of the Italians for Petrarch has greatly diminished in the present age. No poet, in ancient or modern times, not even excepting the sovereign Homer himself, can boast of so numberless a crowd of imitators as Petrarch had in the sixteenth and the two following centuries. The rapid degradation of all manly virtues, and the hypocritical colours that corruption assumed in Italy under the influence of priestcraft and jesuitism, can easily account for the ascendancy that the sweet Platonic strains of the poet of Laura gained over the darker fancy and the severer style of Dante.

But in our days, when, in their hopes for the rebuilding of their country, the Italians have begun to study the works of their most eminent geniuses in reference to their life and character—when, remounting to the source of their evils, they weigh the conduct of those men who had, or could have had, any influence in hastening or in averting them—the indefinable feeling of mistrust with which they listen to the specious patriotic declamations of the friend of John XXII., of Charles IV., and of Galeazzo Visconti, has a cooling, disenchanting effect on their enthusiasm,

which cannot fail to prove fatal in their estimation of his poetical talents.

To make Petrarch answerable for the effeminacy and corruption of his school in after ages is, however, a manifest injustice: nor, until we have ascertained how far a bolder and more inflexible line of conduct on his part might have proved successful, are we entitled to lay to his charge his unwillingness to spurn the seduction that artful iniquity laid in his path, or the moderation or the policy of his patrons, who preferred to soothe his indignation by honours and flatteries, rather than deliver up to the sword of the executioner a head hallowed by the laurel.

Such, however, are the ideas of the Italians towards the memory of Petrarch, that they seem wearied with his unshaded prosperity; and they could be thankful to him had he, like Dante, Macchiavello, and Tasso, borne to his tomb the palm of martyrdom rather than his crown of laurel.

Had his right sense of patriotism been so constant and engrossing a passion as his worship of Laura—had the few specimens on chivalrous or national subjects which are to be read, at wide intervals, throughout his *canzoniere*, been more frequent, the cause of his country would never have found another more eloquent advocate. Those sublime lyrical effusions remain as indicators of his character, as monuments of a mind which the allurements of courtly corruption had not blinded and contaminated, and anxious, as it appears, to clear itself from all charge of participation in the crimes of his age.

Peace be with the memory of Petrarch!

For He alone, by whom his brilliant faculties were so bountifully bestowed, has a right to call him to an account of their employment, and knows how far the man of his choice answered his eternal designs.

CHAPTER III.

BOCCACCIO.

His early Life—His Amours—Joan of Naples—Affairs of Florence—Uguccione della Faggiuola, Castruccio Castracani—The Duke of Athens—Boccaccio's public Life—His Conversion—His last Years—His Classical Studies—The Decameron.

ON the north-western end of the city of Naples, voluptuously encircling that sleepy bay, there spreads a long verdant ridge, which the early Greek colonists called *Pausilypo*, the end of sorrow; because heaven and earth seem to conspire in securing the inhabitants of that privileged spot against all evils attendant on the rest of their race.

Throughout the bowels of the mountain there opens in the rock a wide gallery, a Roman work, three quarters of a mile in length, which, under the name of "Grotta del Monte Posilipo," remained unmatched among the most glorious efforts of man until its wonders were superseded by the bolder undertakings of the galleries of Mount Simplon, and by the never-ending work of the Thames Tunnel.

Above the entrance of that tenebrous passage, in a fragrant grove of orange and myrtle, in sight of Naples and her gulph, of Vesuvius and its wide-spreading sides, exhibited to the worship of five hundred thousand souls, there lies an ancient monument, from time immemorial designated by fame as the tomb of Virgil. The tradition

among the less cultivated classes in the country is, that this Virgil was an old wizard, whose tomb stands, as it were, as the guard of the grotto, that was dug in one night, at his bidding, by a legion of demons enlisted in his service.

Over that haunted sepulchre there grew a laurel, which some of our grandfathers remember still to have seen, and which might perchance be there still, braving the inclemencies of the north winds, and the lightnings of Heaven, had it not been plucked to the very roots by the religious enthusiasm of classical tourists.

Under the shade of that hallowed tree, kneeling on the marble steps of that holy tombstone, there was, five hundred and seven years ago*, a handsome youth of about twenty years of age, with long dark locks falling upon his shoulders, with a bright, smiling countenance, a noble forehead, and features after the best antique Florentine cast, with the hues of health and good humour on his cheeks, and the habitual smile of a man whose life-path had hitherto lain amidst purple and roses.

That youth was Giovanni Boccaccio.

Born under unfavourable circumstances, and obliged to atone by a brilliant life for the stain inflicted upon his nativity by the imprudence and levity of his parents, he was long secretly preyed upon by a vague ambition, which in vain he endeavoured to lay asleep among the dissipations of a disorderly youth. There, on the urn of the Latin poet, to which he often resorted in his disgust of every thing around him, "he," according to his own account, "felt himself suddenly seized by a sacred inspiration, and entered into a daring vow with himself that his name should not perish with him." So much for the religion of ruins and monuments.

Giovanni Boccaccio was born at Paris in 1313, of a

* A.D. 1333.

French lady and a Florentine merchant, named Boccaccio di Chellino, united somewhat after a fashion that was almost legally sanctioned in that town five centuries later, when people were wont to be married "*à la face du soleil, dans un beau jour de printemps, au champ de Mars, devant l'autel de la Patrie.*" His father was a native of Certaldo, of distinguished descent. He gave the young Giovanni all the advantages of a liberal education at home and abroad, and, as a fond, indulgent parent, with little reluctance suffered him to follow his own juvenile inclination, and trusted him to his good genius.

A few years after that secret compact with glory was entered into, to which we have alluded above, Naples was roused into unusual excitement by the arrival of that great conqueror, who, having waged a successful war against Vandalism, hastened now on his way to the Capitol to receive the triumphal crown adjudged to him by the gratitude of his age—Petrarch.

It was in the favourite haunts of his evening walks at Virgil's tomb that Boccaccio first met his illustrious friend: and, though it is not said that that first interview led the two poets to any close intimacy, it did not certainly fail at least to work a deep impression on the susceptible mind of Boccaccio—and the laurel—the Capitol, and the shouts of applauding multitudes, started the youth from his slumbers, and rekindled all the ardour of the votary of fame.

From the moment he devoted his whole self to the muses, Boccaccio felt the necessity of having his Laura. Indeed, being a warm, and, unfortunately, a welcome admirer of the fair sex, he had perhaps as many Lauras as there were beauties in Naples; and, giving to women all the leisure he had left from his studies, he followed, for a long while, a brilliant career of wanton success.

At length, however, he gives us to understand, at the age of twenty-eight, on the eve of Easter-day, one fair

morning of April, 1341, in the church of St. Laurent in Naples, for the first time and the last, he felt all the power of real love, in sight of that fair creature whose charms he consigned to immortality under the name of Fiammetta.

There is such a striking coincidence, such a combination of circumstances of time and place, in the opening of the amours of Petrarch and Boccaccio, that one might almost feel tempted to set down the whole love romance of the last as a fiction, contrived with a view to resemble as closely as he could the man he had proposed to himself as a model. It is always spring-time, Easter, and a church.

Whether because the Catholic service, by exclusively addressing the senses, allows the mind to go astray, or because the mystical twilight of those old cathedrals, or the soft strains of their angelic music, or the magic solemnity of those pious ceremonies, may contribute to soften the heart, and offer it unarmed to tender impressions, no one could safely venture to affirm; but this is well known—that in the days of Boccaccio, and I much fear, even in more recent times, in spite of the ease and liberty afforded by theatres, by public balls, and by that arch tempter, the mask; yet the church, (may Heaven forgive such profanation!) the church is the most convenient place in Italy for love intrigues.

However the love of Boccaccio might resemble in its origin the pure flame of his illustrious friend, it soon proved to be of a much more earthly and matter-of-fact nature, and was therefore likely to meet with easier success. The lovely face that seemed to him so irresistible under the dark veil of her passion-week costume, belonged to no other than the Lady Mary, a natural daughter of King Robert of Anjou, then married several years to a Neapolitan lord of high rank.

Soon the *navicella del suo ingegno* set all sails, and the

"Filocopo" and "Fiammetta" were composed in the course of a few months, under the impulse of passion, every verse being written in honour of his new flame, and under some disguise or other, speaking of none but her.

But those blissful days of love and poetry were soon interrupted.

Widowed and bereft of all children, Boccaccio di Chelino pined away at Florence in grief and loneliness. His dutiful son, complying with his father's wishes, bade Naples a long adieu*, and spent two dull and obscure years under his paternal roof; when, his father having sought refuge against his chagrin for the loss of his wife in the arms of another, Boccaccio left him to the comforts and sweets of his second honeymoon, and hastened back to Fiammetta†.

The good King Robert of Anjou had died in the meanwhile‡, and his granddaughter Joan had inherited his throne.

Young, handsome, vain, and inexperienced, the youthful queen suffered herself to be ruled by her gay flatterers, and allowed in her court, and gave herself the first example, of a brilliant as well as unbounded gallantry. At such a court Boccaccio could not fail to be warmly welcome. The Lady Mary (Fiammetta) enjoyed no light favour with her royal sister, and was not unfrequently invited to preside as Queen of Beauty over the tournaments and courts of love, of which Naples was then the theatre. She appeared at court with the handsome young Florentine by her side, and (the hypocritical denominations of *cicisbeo* and *cavalier servente* being in that rude age happily unknown) she introduced him to the company plainly as her lover.

The grateful poet, so freely admitted to the society of

* A.D. 1342.

† A.D. 1344.

‡ Jan. 1343.

a class of persons that, in the appellation of social convention, were called his betters, soon felt that for a man of his rank nothing remained at court but to act the part of a troubadour; and, willing to repay the queen's kindness, he read over to her stories of love and gallantry, to revive the languishing spirits of her brilliant retinue during the monotonous hours of her protracted levees.

Such, according to the version given by most of Boccaccio's biographers, was the first origin of the *Decameron*.

But storms soon arose against Queen Joan of Naples, and dispersed, in a fright, her merry playfellows.

King Robert, her grandfather, had, for the sake of peace, married her to Andrew, a prince of the Provençal House of Anjou, son of his own eldest brother, and who had, in consequence, better claims to his throne than either himself or his daughter. The rights of the two houses were thus happily blended by this union; the two cousins and consorts were crowned together, and hopes were reasonably entertained that all subjects of future collision were for ever removed.

Events, however, proved contrary to the wisdom of the provident father.

The old popular prejudices against intermarriage between near relations, and a hundred obscure oracles, (it was then the golden age of demonocracy,) hung ominously on the ill-sorted couple. The two young people had received from nature irreconcilable tempers. Andrew was intemperate and brutal; Joan was elegant and refined, but dangerously addicted to all the arts of feminine coquetry. The coarse manners of the prince, and the arrogance of his Provençal courtiers, soon indisposed the Neapolitan nobility, who thought to confer a great kindness on their queen by ridding her of her husband.

One bright starry night, among the joys of a brilliant soirée, the young prince was strangled in his own apart-

ment, and thrown from the battlements of the palace. Two years later, the queen married Louis of Tarento, the well-known instigator of the murder. It is, on a different stage, the whole drama of Darnley and Bothwell.

Louis of Anjou, brother of the murdered Andrew, had meanwhile been called to the throne of Hungary. At the head of a powerful army, he hastened across the Alps to avenge the death of his brother. The states of northern Italy, respecting the justice of his cause, favoured his passage. Joan and her cowardly paramour, not daring to await his arrival, fled to Avignon, imploring the protection of Pope Clement VI., whom the queen won over to her cause by abandoning to him all the rights that the house of Anjou still had on the sovereignty of the Comtat of Avignon. The mighty host of Louis of Hungary was, however, soon swept away by the ruthless pestilence of that ever-memorable year—1348. Louis returned to his states, signing a peace with Joan, who, duly absolved by the pope from all participation in her husband's murder, was restored to her throne in 1351.

Thirty years later, Joan, who had in that interval married three successive husbands, and lived a tranquil, if not a happy life, having in an evil hour interfered in a schism which divided the church on the occurrence of the double election of Clement VII. and Urban VI., was excommunicated and deposed by the latter. Louis of Hungary, who was still cherishing his desire of revenge, charged Charles of Durazzo, his cousin, with the execution of the pope's sentence. The queen surrendered to the Hungarian armies, and was, by order of Durazzo, smothered under her pillows after a few months' captivity.

Boccaccio was, however, destined to witness neither Joan's triumphant return nor her unhappy end. Early in 1350, the tidings of his father's death having reached him, weary of his courtly life, and the tragic scenes that had been perpetrated under his eyes, he quitted Naples,

and hastened to enjoy the quiet of a scholar's life in Florence. Since that time no mention is made of the Lady Mary, his beloved, except in one of Boccaccio's sonnets, which gives ground to conjecture that even that chief attraction that chained him to Naples had ceased to exist.

Various and strange had meanwhile been the fortunes of Florence, since that city had been delivered from her fears on the part of Henry VII. of Luxemburg by the timely death of that emperor in 1313.

The Ghibeline party, against which the Florentine republic was constantly struggling in Tuscany, had found the most valiant champions in the two heroes of Pisa and Lucca, Uguccione dalla Faggiuola and Castruccio Castracani.

The first, a daring chieftain, whose success for a long time equalled his ambition, master of Pisa and Lucca, defeated the Florentines at Monte-Catino in 1314, and would inevitably have led his victorious bands to the conquest of their city, had he not been arrested in his career by simultaneous revolts at Pisa and Lucca, which ended by snatching the sceptre of those two towns from his hands, and paved the road for the usurpations of Castruccio.

Castruccio, who, at the epoch of that insurrection, was held by Uguccione as a prisoner in his castle at Lucca, was, by popular enthusiasm, placed at the head of that republic. He soon showed himself possessed of more brilliant talents, more daring valour, and proved a more dangerous adversary, than his predecessor had ever been, to Florence. He obtained a signal victory over the armies of that republic, and took possession of Pistoia in 1325. About this time happened the descent of Louis of Bavaria into Italy. Castruccio, whose policy equalled his military valour, joined the emperor on his march to Rome, a skilful adviser no less than a powerful auxiliary; escorted him throughout his march, subjected the emperor's weak mind to his un-

swerving will, crowned him on the Vatican in 1328, received from him the titles of Roman senator and palatine count, and returned to Tuscany, with the most sanguine anticipations of uniting all that fair province to his dominions. On his arrival he occupied Volterra and Pisa, besieged and took Pistoia, which had been lost to him during his absence, and turned his arms against Florence. Never had that republic been in more imminent danger; but, as in former extremities, unlooked-for circumstances came to her rescue, and she was released from her terrors by the sudden illness and death of Castruccio, September 1328.

A few years later* Florence was plunged into equal anxieties by the designing ambition of John of Bohemia, who had rallied under his standards the most powerful states of Northern Italy. The absence of the popes, the weakness and long decrepitude of Robert of Anjou, had deprived the Guelphs of their natural chiefs and supporters. Genoa, Bologna, and Parma, had been reduced under the rule of their despots, and Florence was soon left nearly alone in her contest. Pisa, her inveterate rival, profited by her distress, defeated her armies in more than one serious encounter, and took possession of Lucca†.

It was in this emergency that the Florentines, who had hitherto tried and adopted more and more democratic forms of government, now hoped to provide for their safety by putting themselves under the protection of a tyrant.

Chance had brought to Florence one Gualtier de Brienne, a French nobleman, the heir of one of those fortunate adventurers who had shared, in 1204, the spoils of the Eastern empire,—a lack-land sort of a prince, who was now driven out of his states, but who still preserved his title of Duke of Athens.

* A.D. 1331.

† A.D. 1341.

A sudden fit of popular excitement raised him to an almost absolute sovereignty in Florence, where he was intrusted with the safety of the state*. Without having sufficient ability to shield the republic from external danger, the duke had cunning enough to turn the power with which he was invested into the most absolute and arbitrary tyranny. After a whole year of successful usurpation, (it was precisely at the epoch of Boccaccio's first visit to his widowed father,) numerous conspiracies were entered into by every class of citizens; the people arose against him in one mass; and he could only escape from popular exasperation by stealing ignominiously out of Florence, whither he was never to return†.

Thus was Florence still free, and jealous of her freedom, when Boccaccio re-established himself in his father's house, in 1350, in his thirty-seventh year, when he was already conspicuous by the fame of his learning.

The year 1350 was, it will be remembered, the epoch of Petrarch's visit to his father's native place, while on his way to the jubilee at Rome. The meeting of the two poets took place nearly before Boccaccio was well settled at home; and the demonstrations of esteem and affection that the laureate bestowed on his friend tended to increase Boccaccio's popularity among his fellow-citizens.

It was an idea universally cherished in that age, that it beseeemed a republic to turn all individual eminence of genius to public advantage; and magistrates and ambassadors, not unfrequently even leaders of armies, were chosen from among poets and scholars. The encyclopædic turn which all branches of science seemed then naturally to take, and the veneration and awe with which the illiterate crowd looked up to the votaries of learning, scarcely allowed them any doubt as to their fitness for even the

* A.D. 1342.

† A.D. 1343.

most arduous undertakings; and their deep knowledge of jurisprudence actually gave them the greatest advantage in all political and diplomatic transactions.

Accordingly, no sooner was Boccaccio restored to Florence, than he found himself charged with the most important missions of the Florentine republic. He was sent to Rimini and Ravenna, to sue for the alliance of those princes against the threatening power of the Visconti; he crossed the Alps again and again, on his way to the court of Louis of Brandenburg, son of Louis IV. of Bavaria, in 1353; to Avignon in the following year, 1354, and once more in 1355; he was at Rome two years later, to congratulate Pope Urban V. on his re-installment in the metropolis of Christendom.

There were, however, other missions of a humbler, and yet to him dearer nature, which he fulfilled with a more lively satisfaction, and for which he would gladly have given up his more illustrious employments.

There lived still in Ravenna, when Boccaccio was an ambassador at that court—within the shades of a cloister in the convent of Santo Stephano dell' Ulivo—Beatrice, a daughter of Dante, and, if we must judge from her name, his dearest—who had withdrawn herself from the world and its cares, happy to close her eyes in silence by the side of the humble tomb of her father. The Florentines, always anxious to appease the manes of their much-injured bard, sent his helpless and destitute daughter a present of ten florins, and charged with their mission Boccaccio, by whom, without doubt, the idea of that scanty and tardy retribution was originally suggested.

It was, likewise, at his suggestion that the Florentines revoked the decree of banishment and confiscation pronounced against his friend Petrarch's family, and that he was sent to Milan to reconcile him to his country.

How he failed in his mission has already been said; and we have alluded to the differences that arose between those

two illustrious contemporaries on the subject of Petrarch's attachment to the most artful and unprincipled enemies of their common country—the Visconti. But we cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of quoting Boccaccio's own words in a letter to his friend, dated 1354, showing at once the warmth of his patriotism, and the candour and uprightness with which he did not hesitate to upbraid a friend, for whom he entertained more veneration and deference than even love and gratitude.

“I would be silent,” he says, “but I cannot. Reverence restrains, but indignation compels me to speak. How could Petrarch so far forget his own dignity, the conversations we held together concerning the state of Italy, his hatred for the archbishop, (John Visconti,) his love for solitude and independence, so far as to imprison himself at the court of Milan? Why did not Petrarch *obey the dictates of his conscience*? Why did he, who called Visconti a Polyphemus, and a monster of pride, place himself under his yoke? How could Visconti win that which no pontiff, which neither Robert of Naples, nor the emperor himself, could ever obtain?”

To these reproaches there was no answer, and Petrarch was silent. But his kindness and generosity, his vast supremacy of fame, bound Boccaccio to him, and their consonance in literary pursuits easily made up for their discordance in politics.

The Decameron had made its appearance in 1353, and Boccaccio's fame spread far and wide; but this did not go far to improve his fortunes, which, on the contrary, sank lower and lower; partly by the wonted parsimony of republican salaries—partly by inconsiderate expenses occasioned by his literary pursuits—and partly, finally, also, by some indulgence in his dissipated tastes, which his long dealing in philosophy, and the influence of age, had not yet thoroughly amended.

His day of reform and conversion was, however, at hand;

and the circumstances leading to that event are so singular, that the whole transaction has the look of one of the hundred tales of the Decameron.

The Decameron had no sooner appeared, than a general uproar of scandal and indignation arose from all the churches and convents of Christendom. Boccaccio's name was uttered coupled with every term of invective and ignominy, so as scarcely to fall short of identifying him with the Antichrist.

At length a Carthusian monk, from Siena, by name Giovacchino Ciani, moved by more kindly and brotherly feelings—never despairing of the omnipotence of grace—unwilling to abandon any human soul to her doom as long as any breath of hope yet remained—set out on his way to Florence to rescue his prey from the hands of the Evil One.

He introduced himself to the poet, a most unusual and unexpected visitor, and asked for a private interview. There, after having exhausted all the topics of monkish eloquence, he informed him how, two nights before, the blessed Pietro Petroni, a monk of his order, for a long course of unblemished life the oracle of the convent, and just dead in odour of sanctity, had, on his deathbed, in his final confession, under the seal of sacred secrecy, revealed to him the sentence that awaited Giovanni Boccaccio, if he continued impenitent; how the holy man, in his visions of agony, had read that doom in the face of our Redeemer, on whose august forehead all was written, the past—the present—and the future. The monk added, he was charged with similar missions for all the libertines of the age, (rather, we should think, a laborious task,) and that his last visit was reserved for Petrarch. At length, bending on the ear of his astonished listener, and lowering his voice to a whisper, the charitable monitor revealed to him some of the most important events of his life, of which Boccaccio believed himself the only depositary.

Left to his own reflections, the author of the Decameron,

who had, in so many passages of his work, described the tricks and cheats of such cowed prophets and miracle-mongers, and admirably caricatured the very language employed by his ghostly adviser, now, by that air of unction and candour, was completely thrown off his guard, and gave himself up for undone. Then, in a fit of terror, preparing for his imminent fate, and resolving to repair to the same convent whence the awful warning had come, he burnt as many of his licentious works as were still under his control, and wrote his adieu to Petrarch, informing him of his new vocation. The calm admonitions of his friend partly revoked that hasty resolution. He persisted, however, in putting on the church robes, and his life was, to its end, sage and exemplary.

The state of the poet's private finances was most amply calculated to aid his plans of penitence and reform. During the last period of his wandering life, Boccaccio was more or less afflicted with poverty.

He flattered himself to have found a liberal patron in the seneschal Acciaiuoli, a Florentine prince, residing in Naples, but was soon to be undeceived.

This nobleman, who had been a friend and counsellor of Louis of Tarento, Joan's second husband, and who had followed the two fugitive princes with constancy and fidelity in the hour of adversity, was, at their restoration, rewarded with unlimited favour and confidence. He was one of Petrarch's thousand and one friends and correspondents, and, like many other noblemen of that age, gave himself all the airs of a liberal patron of learning. Extreme want, and a vague desire, perhaps, of revisiting a place endeared to him by so many juvenile associations, in an evil hour induced Boccaccio to accept the seneschal's magnificent invitations, and to repair to his palace in Naples, charged with the functions of biographer and historiographer of the great man*. He was sent up to a squalid room in the

* A.D. 1360.

garrets, and directed to take his place at table with footmen and stable-boys.

Republican as he was, Boccaccio had no such notions of equality.

He ran off from the proud mansion, and took refuge in the house of Mainardo Cavalcanti, one of his Florentine friends residing in Naples. Hence he crossed over to Venice, to throw himself into the arms of Petrarch; hence again he returned to Florence, and soon after repaired to his father's native village, Certaldo, his age and his literary pursuits having unfitted him for the tumults of the popular factions with which Florence was then agitated. A few political missions and friendly excursions hardly ever diverted his attention, for a long time, from his dearest literary employments; and it never was without regret he left, never without transport he revisited, the solitude of his paternal dwelling.

He felt as if he had found his final resting-place, and as if nothing remained for him but to smooth his pillow, and lay him down and rest.

The tidings of Petrarch's death, which he received late in 1374, seemed to warn him that his own hour had struck. He withdrew from Florence, where he had been called to read and expound the Divine Comedy, and died at home in Certaldo, in December, 1375, aged sixty-three.

Such was the end of Giovanni Boccaccio; in his youth an epicure, a courtier, a libertine; in his age a scholar, a citizen, a devotee; but all over his life an upright, noble character; warm, loyal, modest, inaccessible to jealousy or simulation, though easily driven after the first impulses of a passionate nature, nor always insensible to the seductions, the follies, the superstitions of that unsettled state of society, of which he was to leave in his works such a faithful representation.

As a restorer of classical literature, Boccaccio has hardly less claims to the gratitude of modern ages than his friend

Petrarch, notwithstanding the more extensive influence and greater means this last could employ in his researches.

What Petrarch had done for the restoration of Latin, Boccaccio performed for the restitution of Greek.

The labour and expense these two noble champions, and likewise their allies, followers, and successors, had to undergo in transcribing and purchasing; the obstacles they had to overcome in collecting and arranging the ancient manuscripts, for which we are wholly indebted to them, can only be conceived by such as have a distinct idea of the prevailing ignorance of that age.

We have all heard of that absurd traveller who ran back in horror and disgust from an inland town in the western states of North America, because he found it impossible to procure any *Macassar oil* in the place, being thereby made aware that he had outstepped the limits of the civilised world. But we can hardly imagine what must have been the feelings of Petrarch, when we read in his letters, that travelling in his youth through Flanders, and happening to discover in Liege an old copy of Cicero's *de Officiis*, in the total impossibility of finding any man in that then populous and thriving town capable of transcribing a Latin manuscript, he set about it himself, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he could obtain *any liquid* in some manner answering the purpose of *ink*.

What more? In Italy itself, and in one of the most advanced and polished of all Italian towns—in Venice, the library which had cost Petrarch so many years of study and care, and which he had offered as a present to the republic, with a fond hope to secure it against all chances of war, with which every town on the continent was incessantly menaced—in Venice itself, through no other accident than stupid neglect, not one volume of that collection has been preserved; not even the slightest document recording how that invaluable treasure was lost to posterity.

The fame that the monastery of Monte Cassino had long

time enjoyed, as the sanctuary of literature, induced Boccaccio to visit its library during a short excursion he made through those provinces. He was shown to a large granary without skylight or windows, to which he could only have access by the aid of a ladder ; there, piled up in a shapeless mass, lay, plunged in a spell-bound silence, those sages of antiquity who had so long a tale to unfold of the past. Neither the monks nor their visitors ever frequented that lurid hall, nor did they ever resort to those books, but when through want of papyrus they were compelled to erase the dialogues of Plato for the dissertations of one of their doctors, or the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid for the legends of one of their saints.

Manuscripts came thus into the hands of the amateur without beginning or end, without title-page or index, with an obsolete or absurd orthography, and with a hundred different conventional abbreviations. This accounts for the numberless and apparently aimless journeys those earliest discoverers were constantly engaged in, in their advanced age—regardless of the inclemency of the seasons and the insecurity of the roads. This also accounts for their pecuniary embarrassments, their extensive correspondence, and the many agents they employed, absorbing the more money in proportion as intelligence was, in that age of brute force, comparatively scarce. Thus we read of Petrarch that he kept four secretaries constantly at work ; of Boccaccio, that he copied with his own hand Livy, Tacitus, Terence, Boethius, a great part of Cicero, and Varro. Homer and Dante he transcribed more than twice, and these not so much for his own use as with an object to present his friends with them ; or, in moments of distress, with the purpose to offer them for sale. No less perseverance and disinterestedness were required to rescue the ancient world from the deep layers of barbarism under which it was buried ; the cells of the convents, the cellars and prisons, the darkest corners of the earth, were dugged and searched,

and ancient literature arose, as it were, like Pompeii and Herculaneum, from the bowels of the earth.

For all that the moderns know of ancient Greek, they are indebted to Boccaccio. Dante, in his own age one of the most widely informed scholars, never, perhaps, had regularly studied that language. Petrarch says of himself, in his letter of thanks to Boccaccio for the *Iliad* with which he had presented him, that he delighted in the sound of Homer's verses, though he was unable to understand them.

The first school of Greek in modern Europe was opened under the auspices of Boccaccio.

Petrarch had met in Padua, and been somewhat familiar with Leontius Pilatus, one of the many Greek grammarians who sought refuge in Italy from the tumults that were hastening the final subversion of the eastern empire. Leontius was a Calabrian by birth, but by choice a Greek; he was full of that false patriotic egotism, so natural in all countries that have reached a high degree of culture and prosperity, and which consisted in a sovereign contempt for all that was not Greek. He was cross, vain, and arrogant—a bear in a scholar's garb. Petrarch, the refined and courtier-like Petrarch, could never manage, nor, even for the sake of his Greek, endure him. But Boccaccio's greater knowledge of human nature, amenity of manners, and versatility of genius, forced a smile even on the lips of the grizzly grammarian, who was induced to follow him to Florence. There Boccaccio entertained him hospitably in his own house for three years, obtained from the senate a decree for the erection of a Greek school, made himself his first pupil, and succeeded in perfectly mastering the difficulties of that noblest of languages. He undertook, with his aid, a translation of Homer into Latin, and, by his example and activity, spread over all Italy a novel taste for the Greek classics.

From his first attempts must be dated that important

diversion that Greek scholars, during that and the following century, operated in Italian literature, especially under the patronage of Cosmo, and of his grandson, Lorenzo de Medici.

Of his Latin works, of which the style is by the critics considered far inferior to that of Petrarch, we deem it beyond our office to discourse; and as we only take into consideration the works that still keep an eminent rank in Italian literature, we shall pass in silence the *Teseide*, *Filocopo*, and *Fiammetta*, the *Life* and *Commentaries* on Dante, studying Boccaccio merely as the author of the *Decameron* *.

The *Decameron*, or the *Ten Days*, is a collection of one hundred of those novels and tales which Boccaccio is believed to have read at the court of Queen Joan of Naples, and which, later in life, were by him assorted together by a most simple and ingenious contrivance.

The merit of the original invention of Boccaccio's plan has been often made a subject of contest, but we think with little foundation. The subject, too, of several of his tales has been traced to some far-fetched origin, but very little to the detriment of his glory. The *Decameron* has remained for many centuries the best model for the story-tellers of all countries; whilst the legends and ballads, from which he might be presumed to have drawn, are more than half buried in oblivion.

The scaffoldings by which the great fabric was propped up during its erection, have been removed, and it now

* Boccaccio's Latin works: "*De Genealogia Deorum*"—" *De Montium Sylvarum, Lacuum, Fluviorum, Stagnorum et Marium Nominibus*"—" *De Casibus Virorum et Fœminarum illustrium*"—" *De claris Mulieribus*"—" *Eclogæ*." Italian works: "*La Teseide*"—" *L' amorosa Visione*"—" *Il Filostrato*"—" *Il Nimfale Fiesolano*"—" *Il Filocopo*"—" *L' amorosa Fiammetta*"—" *L' Urbano*"—" *L' Ameto*"—" *Il Corbaccio*"—" *Vita di Dante*"—" *Commentario a la Commedia di Dante*"—" *Il Decameron*." First edition of the "*Decameron*," 1470. Best edition, by Giunti, in Florence, 1527.

stands alone and secure, as if it were the work of enchantment.

It is a well-known fact that Boccaccio did not witness the dread mortality of 1348 in Florence ; and the appalling description he made of it in the introduction to his tales, must have been drawn from a bold association of ideas, by referring to his reminiscences of his native place, the miserable spectacle he beheld with his own eyes again and again in Naples, in Padua, in every town and province of Italy.

From Thucydides to Botta, Manzoni, and Bulwer, there has been no lack of descriptions of pestilence.

Both romancers and historiographers seemed always well aware of the great results that would be derived to their narrative, from the exhibition of a whole race struck by that most direful of scourges. Yet Boccaccio's stands unrivalled for truth and evidence ; and the happy idea of choosing, by way of contrast, so gloomy an *overture* to effusions of so gay a nature, has been too often, we think, and too lightly set down as an extravagant aberration from the rules of taste. The sufferings so keenly described in the poem are intended to throw light upon the more brilliant pictures of the enchanting country in the neighbourhood of Florence. The ten gay recluses, who, desirous of withdrawing themselves from the public calamity, have repaired to the genial shades of their country-seats, there endeavouring to abstract themselves from their terrors, in the enjoyment of every luxury, and in the pleasurable entertainments of a sympathetic society, seem constantly to be haunted by the phantoms of the scourge they have left behind ; and among their flowery walks, their songs, their carols and feasts, the warbling of the birds, the murmur of the springs, those gallant story-tellers, and not less the fancy of their readers, seem constantly distracted by the groans of the dying, and the funeral knell of the desolate city.

It must be equally said to the praise of Boccaccio, that

he succeeded in bestowing something like order and unity upon so vast a conception. Boccaccio gave us in one volume the virtues and vices of the human family, the whole world in a stage. There we have dupes and rogues, misers and libertines, ladies, knights, Jews and pagans; pilgrims, saints, angels, pirates and robbers; kings, popes, cardinals, and monks—monks above all, white and grey, and blue monks—monks without end.

No writer in Italy, and few out of Italy, ever more deeply understood, or more forcibly depicted the human heart, than Boccaccio; none more possessed with that *vis comica* which has power to compel mankind to laugh at their own foibles, and to make them wiser at their own expense. The best part of Boccaccio's tales have an eminently moral aim, and must, in his own times, have had a salutary effect, "in so far as they boldly unmasked all kind of hypocrisy, and stripped vice of its alluring disguises. True virtue and magnanimity never fail to find a warm advocate and panegyrist in Boccaccio; and some of his heroic tales sufficiently show how deeply rooted were yet in Italy the loftiest chivalrous feelings.

Only, in his eagerness to be true to his model, he represented society in its most shocking nudity; and in his fondness for jesting he never refrained from the coarsest jokes, or from the most obscene allusions, which are happily, in our day, too disgusting to be any longer very dangerous. The hearty laugh of Queen Joan, and the provoking blush of his princess, the universal applause of a gross and idiotic age, encouraged Boccaccio to continue in a style which he had occasion to regret, as we have seen, during the rest of his life.

While, however, we praise the conduct of

"La mère qui en défend la lecture à la fille,"

we cannot help pitying the efforts of those who hope to purify the Decameron of all improprieties, by mutilating

or paraphrasing its tales, or endeavouring to explain its double-entendres by silly allegories. In order to make an honest book of Boccaccio, you must do like that learned Florentine dyer, who, having been challenged to *blot out* all faults of a poem he had been heard to censure, answered by plunging the book into a caldron of black.

But the merits that Boccaccio's writings have always had in the eyes of his countrymen, chiefly consisted in the purity and elegance, the richness and roundness, the fluency of language. The Decameron completed the work of the poem of Dante and Petrarch's *canzoniere*; and yet his classical studies, his veneration, we would say, his idolatry for Latin, have contributed to give the Italian language a specious, artificial turn, a vague, unnatural construction, a verbosity, an intricacy, that render it, in prose at least, for a modern language, exceedingly affected and unwieldy.

The wonderful precision and energy of Dante was diluted and vitiated in the round periods of Boccaccio; so that, notwithstanding the more manly diction of Macchiavello and Alfieri, Italian prose has scarcely yet, after five centuries, been set upon any regular standard. The devotion of a great many Italians for their first master of prose has, however, considerably subsided; and it is not difficult to find, out of Florence, persons willing to admit, that "if Boccaccio's *language* is peradventure the best, his *style* is altogether the worst."

But if his credit among the philologues is perhaps on its wane, his value as an inventor, as an adept in the magic of the human heart, as a fertile, various, lively narrator, has in Italy and elsewhere reached its zenith; and, in the ever-floating balance of the opinions of men, his name, as a genius endowed with powerful faculties, stands far above that of his more fortunate and illustrious contemporary, Petrarch; as his character for firmness and frankness, for unassuming modesty, and unswerving integrity, is above every shadow of blemish.

Time is a slow but sure and impartial dispenser of justice to generous spirits. The pomps of a court, and the applause of a bedazzled multitude, fade and die off within the silence of the grave. Truth alone remains, like one of the funeral lamps, preserving a spark of life in the darkness of ages, when time has swept off even the dust of the tomb.

The world has now come to a conclusion which would have been resented by Boccaccio as an insult during life—which seems as if it would grieve him, even in his place of eternal rest—that he was endowed with a greater mind and a nobler heart than his friend.

CHAPTER IV.

MACCHIAVELLO.

Italian Condottierie—Success of their Arms at home and abroad—Their pernicious Influence on the Destinies of the Country—Francesco Sforza—Carmagnola—Ladislaus of Naples—Origin of the Medici—Conspiracies at Milan—at Florence—at Rome—State of Italy towards the end of the Fifteenth Century—of Europe—Foreign Invasions—Charles VIII. Louis XII.—League of Cambray—Holy League—Wars of Francis I. and Charles V.—Effects of the Foreign Invasions on the National Character—A view of the surviving States—Venice—Genoa—Andrea Doria—Last Downfall of Florence—Savonarola—Macchiavello—Francesco Ferruccio—Crowning of Charles V.—Conclusion.

THE enjoyment of independence and freedom could only be continued in Italy by the same instrument with which it was originally secured—superiority in arms. As long as the population of the Lombard towns could be mustered in steady battalions before their walls, or ranged behind their bulwarks to the direction of their engines of war, the hosts of their ancient rulers, the German emperors, had no chance of establishing a firm footing in the country. They ventured sometimes across the Alps; they swept adown the open plain with awe and mistrust; they conciliated the good will of those restless republicans by flattering their factious propensities; they crowned their Cæsar on the Capitol with little pomp or ceremony, and hastened back to their home in the North, glad to have so cheaply escaped from a fated land, which had been the tomb of myriads of their predecessors.

But those warlike virtues, which were no longer put in requisition to repel the attacks of foreign invaders, were turned to the gratification of unnatural ambition, were made subservient to the mean spirit of municipal jealousies, were exhausted in the atrocities of brotherly feuds.

Milan, Venice, and Florence, the most conspicuous and powerful cities, conspired against the liberties of such of their neighbours as had, by their co-operation and alliance, been most efficient to bring about the triumph of their national cause. Como, Crema, Tortona, Brescia, Verona, and a great number of others whose names sounded so glorious for deeds of heroism during the wars of the Lombard league, had long since disappeared from the list of free towns. Finally, in 1406, Florence consummated her long-premeditated fratricide by the extinction of Pisa.

No sooner had the final doom of any of the conquered republics been sealed, than all public spirit and energy, industry and commercial prosperity, were at an end. The generous and active, who had not perished in the defence of their municipal independence, removed to new scenes of action, or emigrated to foreign countries, preferring the evanescent hopes, the vain regrets, the misery and loneliness of exile, to the spectacle of the degradation and thralldom of their native city. The lowest classes plunged into utter dejection and apathy, and remained neutral spectators, if they did not actually exult at the dangers that threatened their conquerors. The power of Milan and Florence thus essentially diminished in the same measure as those cities strove to increase the extent of their territory.

But when the disorders of tumultuous democracy paved the way for the rise of domestic despotism—when every town, especially of Lombardy, had fallen a victim to the valour or to the cunning and perfidy of a daring chieftain, the enthralled population were either easily induced by weariness and despondency, or forcibly compelled, to lay down their arms. The defence of the state was trusted to

the care of him who had alone an interest in its preservation, and the Italians were trained up to that school of absolute passiveness which alone can befit a generation of slaves.

The earliest tyrants upon whom the protection of the states they had unlawfully seized upon, thus naturally devolved, were indeed generally equal to their task. Whatever might be the vices and crimes with which their memory is contaminated, the military talents of such men as Mastino, and Cane della Scala, of Matteo and Bernabò Visconti, of Francesco da Carrara and Castruccio Castracani, cannot be called in question. In all the endless contests in which their mutual suspicions and jealousies constantly engaged them, they were always seen at the head of their soldiery, exciting their warlike enthusiasm by striking examples of personal prowess.

The usurpers of republican freedom seemed to have, for a long period of years, inherited and concentrated upon themselves all the splendour of republican bravery.

But the leaders were almost the only Italians that fought in their armies.

The warriors they led into the field were not natives of the country in whose defence, or for whose possession, they were made to lavish their blood. Their ranks were filled up by those swarms of northern mercenaries whom want of fame, or curiosity, or not unfrequently hunger and poverty, led into Italy in quest of adventure. To these half-savage hirelings the Lombard princes, who could not, or would not, rely on the support of their reluctant and murmuring subjects, entrusted their personal safety, no less than the furtherance of their ambitious schemes. The terror struck among the inhabitants of Italy by the fierce aspect and habits, and by the bloody executions of those ferocious Northerners, had no little effect in deterring them from those martial pursuits for which their comparative mildness and civility seemed to unfit them. The progress

of trade and agriculture, and the wealth attendant upon their cultivators, invited the laborious Tuscans and Lombards to more peaceful avocations; and war, which had hitherto been the freeman's duty, became the soldier's trade, and was given up to those French and German cut-throats, who seemed to be born for no other more honest or humane calling.

But the Italian princes, as well as their subjects, had soon occasion to repent the haste with which they had laid down their sword, and abandoned themselves to the mercy of lawless robbers.

For a few years the whole unarmed country became a prey to their ravaging fury. After having offered their services to the highest bidder, and fought for any state that could afford to hire them and their horses, finding themselves at large after the restoration of peace, they carried on the war on their own account, and declared themselves the enemies of all the world. Had there ever been among so many elements of material strength only one superior leading genius to give their depredations union of design, Italy might perhaps have bowed before them, and its independence have met with a premature fate. But, as it was, their career was only a work of destruction. Werner, Lando, Hawkwood, and Walter of Montreal, notwithstanding the romantic interest excited of late in favour of some of them, were nothing but brutal freebooters, distinguished among their French, English, or German followers, by no other quality than a stronger frame, a fiercer countenance, and a heavy dealing hand.

The day of foreign bondage had not yet come for Italy.

As soon as they perceived how the mercenary swords of their foreign auxiliaries could be turned against their bosoms, the Lombard princes, made aware of their improvidence, called their subjects to arms; Florence mustered her bands of undisciplined and yet undaunted burghers; all Italy

arose sword in hand, and for another century she ruled uncontrolled over the battle-field.

It has already been said, that from the day in which the appeal of Petrarch had power to induce the Italians to free their country from those bands of foreign marauders, a company of Italian men-at-arms was formed by the order of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, commanded by Alberigo di Barbiano, in 1378, which, under the name of the Company of St. George, soon proved formidable to the French and German leaders, under whom Alberigo himself and the greatest part of his followers had made their apprenticeship.

The school of Barbiano gave Italy that long succession of celebrated condottieri, who, down to the descent of Charles VIII., raised the art of war to its highest standard, and gave the Italians a wide ascendancy over their foreign competitors. Towards the beginning of the fifteenth century, Braccio da Montone and Sforza Attendolo, the inventors of different systems of military tactics, enrolled in their ranks the most generous Italian youths; and the *Bracceschi* and *Sforzeschi* schools constituted two emulous military factions, and disputed against each other the palm of superior valour and skill in a hundred encounters.

By falling into the hands of the Italians, the art of war seemed to have laid aside, in a great measure, its horrors, and participated of the gentleness and refinement for which a more advanced civilisation gave that nation, in the Middle Ages, so great a superiority over their ultramontane neighbours.

The perfection to which the Milanese armourers had brought their manufacture of defensive weapons, had gone far to secure the absolute invulnerableness of man and horse. Valour, directed by foresight and intelligence, gave rise to that complicated order of manœuvres and

stratagems which the ancients so well knew how to turn to advantage, but which was looked upon with contempt by the headlong impetuosity of feudal chivalry. The Italians first taught how the greatest results could be obtained with the least possible effusion of blood. These gallant adventurers, mostly issuing from the same school, generally enlisted in a cause to which they were perfect strangers, substituted love of fame and generous emulation for the thirst of prey, or for the rabid inveteracy of party spirit. Feelings of chivalrous courtesy and forbearance, indivisible from genuine bravery, soon prevailed among men who were actuated by no personal rancour. The maxim, "*Uomo in terra non fa più guerra*," (never strike on a fallen foe,) is characteristically national. The custom of setting prisoners of war unransomed at liberty, soon after the first heat of conflict, arose from a natural impulse of the Italian soldiery, which their leaders in vain would have attempted to resist.

A battle in Italy was little more than a tournament. The conqueror and the vanquished parted with nearly balanced losses, soon to meet again on another field, and under different standards.

Perhaps this system of mutual mercy and indulgence was carried to extravagance; and when we read in Machiavello (who, however, in this case is by no means to be relied upon,) of some engagements, such as those of Anghiari and Castracaro, in which, after the action of a whole morning, only two or three men were lost, and those only in consequence of the heat of the day and the weight of armour—we may feel tempted to laugh. But as long as that kind of warfare was sufficient to protect the country from all foreign aggression, and had power to spare the trembling multitude the spectacle of useless carnage; as long as those kind-hearted champions were dreaded and revered abroad, and their services requested by the most liberal offers—as it happened in France and

Burgundy, during what was called the "war of the public weal," where the Italians measured their forces against the adventurers of every nation—we have hardly reason to quarrel with them, if, by allowing their conquered enemies to escape unhurt, they enhanced the importance of their services, and prolonged the duration of the campaign to secure the continuation of their appointments.

It was only after a period of one hundred and twenty years, at the epoch of the descent of Charles VIII. in 1494, that the Italians found themselves once more in front of foreign armies; and then the relentless cruelty with which the French cavalry slew their prostrate enemies in cold blood, and the many instances in which a surrendering garrison was put to the sword against all the rights of nations, struck a new panic among the descendants of Braccio and Sforza, who could not see the reason of that wanton barbarity.

The whole discipline of an army had also, by that time, undergone a complete revolution.

The battalions of Swiss infantry had learned in their Burgundian wars to withstand the charge of the best cavalry of Europe. The use of field artillery, also a new and quite anti-Italian invention, which destroyed whole ranks at one stroke, and doomed to the same fate the bravest as well as the meanest combatant, had a demoralising effect upon the southern soldiery, among whom every man-at-arms was accustomed to rely rather on his individual powers than on the combined efforts of masses.

But we anticipate events.

Before those companies of Italian militia were driven by foreigners from the field which they occupied during the whole course of the fifteenth century, they had been one of the most efficient instruments to undermine the spirit of Italian nationality.

The difficulty of training men and horses to the complicated manœuvres of the heavy-armed cavalry, widened

the distance between soldiers and citizens. Those were Italians, but by no means national troops. They owed their origin and their support to a tyrant, and found their interest in ministering to his ambition. As is but too often the case, even in more enlightened ages, the soldiers hated and despised the people from which they were chosen; they were apt to consider the public property as their own appanage; they trod upon their native land as on the prize of conquest; they laid the country which they had sworn to protect, under a summary execution, whenever their employers were either slow or reluctant to fulfil their engagements. On their part, they were not always scrupulous in maintaining their promises; they evinced a very indifferent fidelity to their employer, and oftentimes divided his states between them. Jacopo del Verme, Facino Cane, Pandolfo Malatesta, Ottobon Terzo, and other captains of adventure, to whose guardianship Gian Galeazzo Visconti had committed the minority of his two sons, Gian Maria and Filippo Maria, took advantage of the disorder and anarchy into which the state had fallen, and seized upon the cities of that large duchy, to the spoliation of its legitimate heirs*.

Forty-four years later, Francesco Sforza, son of Sforza Attendolo—of an adventurous leader, who, by changing his woodman's hatchet into a trooper's battle-axe, had raised himself to the rank of the greatest condottieri—obtained the hand of Bianca, the illegitimate daughter of Filippo Maria, the last Visconti, and was by him raised to the sovereignty of Cremona. After the death of the duke, who left no legitimate heir, (for the imperial bull which had invested Gian Galeazzo with the duchy of Milan, in 1395, expressly excluded women from the succession,) the ambitious Sforza resolved to make good by the strength of arms a title to which his marriage gave

* A.D. 1403.

him no claims. He offered his services to the Milanese, who, after the demise of their last duke, had reconstituted their ancient republic, and allying himself with the Venetians, their enemies, led his victorious armies against the Lombard capital, and after a short siege was, by its half-famished inhabitants, acknowledged as their absolute master*.

These examples soon proved contagious among the unprincipled soldiery by which the country was overrun. It seemed as if the good old times of chivalry had been revived, when the meanest page had only to set out on a fine morning, and let the reins loose on the neck of his courser, sure that the faithful instinct of that sagacious animal would carry his rider to the land of peril and adventure, where he could, at his choice, aspire to the coronet of a lord, or the hand of a princess.

To the thirst of gold, and the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, which seemed alone to animate the bands of foreign plunderers in the preceding century, the Italian condottieri substituted the wary designs of a loftier ambition.

Braccio da Montone, Niccolò Piccinino, Bartolomeo Coleoni, and many others, established each of them their dominion in some of the towns of Romagna. The cities of that province, from which the best combatants were especially recruited, underwent a complete military organisation, and were almost daily forced to acknowledge new despots. Venice and Florence alone knew how to associate those leaders in the defence of their territories, without ever allowing them to interfere with their governments, or to march their troops into their capitals.

* The Sforza were known as private gentlemen in their native place of Cotignola towards the year 1326. The story of the woodman's hatchet exchanged for a trooper's battle-axe is purely a romantic invention. The family is still extant in many branches.

It was only a century later that Florence was at length compelled, in her last extremities, to depart from this line of policy; and the final overthrow of her free state was the consequence of the trust she put in the support of a soldier of fortune, Malatesta Baglioni.

Venice, owing to her impregnable site, or perhaps to the arts of that dark, suspicious policy by which she watched over the generals she held in her pay, never met with a similar fate. She defeated all their ambitious schemes by adroit counterplots; she knew, at the slightest intimation of defection or treason, how to rid herself, by fair means or foul, of her dangerous defenders.

Francesco Carmagnola—a Piedmontese, who had also risen from a peasant to the rank of one of the best generals of his age; who had by turns established and shaken the throne of Filippo Maria Visconti, and who, out of resentment against his former employer, had entered into the service of his enemies, the Venetians—having awakened the sleepless mistrust of that jealous aristocracy, was allured to Venice by every demonstration of honour and friendship; and there, having unwarily suffered himself to be separated from his guards, was surprised, arrested, and beheaded in the square of San Marco, with all that silence and hurry, with all that awful mystery, which long since involved all the proceedings of the Venetian oligarchy*.

Meanwhile, the Italians, as a nation, had long since ceased to offer any resistance to the usurpations of power. They had learned blindly to recognise the right of the strongest; they had felt that their efforts could have no better result than a change of masters; and resigned themselves to abide by the decrees of fortune, and bear the yoke of any man whom the chances of combat had given power to impose it.

* A.D. 1432.

In Florence alone, force was not yet a supreme, uncontrollable arbiter.

The wealth and prosperity of that commercial republic enabled it to oppose the resources of inexhaustible treasures against the incessant efforts of the tyrants of Lombardy.

It was a war of gold against iron.

The best lances of the Italian free companies were ever at the service of the Florentine merchants. The adroit management of their diplomatists never failed to enlist in the cause of their republic the remotest auxiliaries. Fortuitous circumstances, such as sudden deaths, famine, and pestilence, seemed to conspire to the protection of Florence.

Gian Galeazzo Visconti, who, since the year 1390, having added to his ample possessions of Lombardy, Genoa, Perugia, Siena, Lucca, and Pisa, encompassed all around the Florentine territory, was suddenly struck by the hand of Providence on the very eve of removing the last obstacle to his sovereignty of Italy by the subjugation of Florence*.

Ladislaus, King of Naples, son of that Charles of Durazzo, who had deprived Queen Joan of her crown and life, having, by an unblushing violation of all faith and principle, cleared his way to the throne, and prevailed over the princes of the rival branches of Anjou, was seized by a vain ambition of extending his dominion beyond the confines of his kingdom. He took advantage of the state of anarchy into which the States of the Church had been thrown since more than half a century, by the dissensions of the great western schism, subdued Rome, Perugia, the March and the Duchy of Spoleto, and advanced towards the centre of Tuscany. A long series of campaigns ensued, in which the great masters of the Sforzeschi and

* A.D. 1402.

Bracceschi schools had frequent opportunities of measuring their forces. The Florentines would, however, according to all probabilities, have succumbed in that unequal contest, had not a sudden illness again come to their rescue, and forced Ladislaus back to his states, where he only arrived in time to expire in his capital*.

War continued to rage at Naples with redoubled vigour during the reign of Ladislaus' sister, Joan II., a weak and profligate woman, who, obeying the influence of worthless minions, gave, by her frequent adoptions, rise to the pretensions of several competitors, and plunged her kingdom into numberless factions, from which it never recovered until Alphonso the Magnanimous, King of Arragon and Sicily, after long disastrous vicissitudes, made good his own rights against his opponents, and revived in the Two Sicilies the happy times of Frederic II*.

Gian Maria Visconti, and Filippo Maria, his brother, cowardly, but crafty and ambitious despots, proved no less dangerous enemies to Florence than Gian Galeazzo, their father, had been before them. But the sudden assassination of Gian Maria, their alliance with the Venetians, and the opportune defection of Carmagnola, operated in favour of the Florentines; and after the extinction of the Visconti in 1447, their successors, the Sforza, never felt sufficiently strong on their throne to meddle with the affairs of Tuscany, so that this province was freed from all molestation on the part of external powers, until the evil destinies of Italy started up new enemies from the other side of the Alps.

Meanwhile, there flourished at Florence a family, who, arising from utter obscurity, had acquired immense riches by engaging in deep commercial speculations, and lavished that wealth in the promotion of public welfare, to make it an instrument of political ascendancy.

* A.D. 1414.

† A.D. 1442.

Cosmo, the third representative of the family of Medici, in his youth the wealthiest merchant in Europe, a lover of literature, and a friend and patron of its cultivators; a liberal, hospitable, affable man, affecting popular feelings and habits, and courting the public favour by unbounded liberalities, rallied around him the numerous malcontents, and set up a strong opposition against the burgher aristocracy, which, especially under the guidance of Rinaldo degli Albizzi, monopolised the sovereignty of the republic*.

The headlong impetuosity of his competitors, and the unjust sentence of banishment that was pronounced against him, centered all the popular predilections upon his head, and, at his return, he found himself the idol of the multitude, the sole arbiter of the popular voice.

Cosmo died in 1464, and the flattering, but in that age rather common, inscription of "Pater patriæ," was engraven upon his tomb.

Piero, his son, who succeeded to his wealth, did not equally inherit his talents or his popularity. But the party that had been for thirty-four years attached to his father's fortunes, did not desert him, and he was enabled to transmit, at his death, in 1469, the lustre of his family undiminished to his children, Lorenzo and Giuliano. Thus had lassitude from long political turmoils, the influence of the irresistible ascendancy of wealth, and the display of liberal accomplishments, carried into effect what violence might, peradventure, never have been able to ac-

* The Medici, not known at Florence before the middle of the thirteenth century, probably of plebeian origin. The immediate predecessors of Cosmo were Giovanni, who fought the battles of the republic in 1351; Salvestro, who was its chief magistrate in 1379; Veri de Medici, his son; Giovanni, the father of Cosmo, and founder of the greatness of his house. He died in 1428. He left two sons, Cosmo, the *father of his country*, born in 1389; and Lorenzo, from whom sprung the grand-ducal branch of the family, in 1394.

comply—the subjection of Florence. The jealous watchfulness of those turbulent republicans was gradually lulled to sleep by the blandishments of an obsequious *parvenu*, by the blessings of uninterrupted tranquillity, and the consequent progress of trade and industry, and by the splendour of a revival of literature.

The people of Lombardy were, therefore, forcibly resigned, those of Tuscany willingly reconciled, to the loss of civil freedom: terror or gratitude had equally established order and silence among the lowest classes; but there lived still in Milan, as well as in Florence, a great number of ardent minds, who could not be so easily induced to subscribe to the enthrallment of their country, and submit to that levelling system to which all centralisation of absolute power displays more or less an open tendency.

The spirit of resistance had passed from a riotous multitude to an emulous nobility. The age of insurrections was followed by the age of conspiracies.

Already, in 1412, Gian Maria, the eldest son of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, guilty of the most revolting atrocities, had perished at Milan by the hand of noble conspirators. Filippo Maria, his brother, owed his safety merely to his pusillanimity, by which he shut himself up, during his whole reign, a prisoner in his palace. Francesco Sforza, his illegitimate successor, disarmed his enemies by his brilliant valour, no less than by his frank and generous confidence. But his son, Galeazzo, who rivalled and surpassed the worst of his predecessors in deeds of cruelty and libertinism, fell a victim to the just indignation of three generous Milanese youths belonging to those noble families that had offered the warmest resistance to his father's usurpations. In the midst of his guard, on the threshold of a church, surrounded by a trembling multitude, the dagger of patriotic resentment found its way to the tyrant's best blood. Two of those noble assassins were struck down by the side of the murdered duke. Olgiati,

the bravest of the three, threw himself among the crowd, calling the Milanese to arms and liberty; but was soon overtaken, and atoned for his offence by the most excruciating martyrdom. He proved, by his rare constancy in death, by what noble feelings he and his associates were actuated.

Never was a people called to liberty by more disinterested enthusiasts. But the people looked on and stood silent*.

Frequent disturbances threatened, in the meanwhile, the gradual progress of the house of Medici at Florence. Bernardo Nardi, one of the many exiles who filled Italy with the grievances they endured from the crushing ascendancy of that fortunate family, resolved on a rash and hopeless attack of the petty town of Prato, where, with all the impatience and sanguineness of an exile, he hoped that the Florentines only awaited a signal—needed only to hear the rustling of an insurrectionary standard, to rise in open rebellion.

The headsman of Lorenzo de Medici soon cured him of his illusion †.

Eight years after the doleful tragedy of Prato, the Pazzi, a noble, numerous, and powerful family, seconded by the most conspicuous houses of the Florentine aristocracy, entered into an awful conspiracy against the life of Lorenzo and Julian. Pope Sixtus IV., a violent and sanguinary despot, and Ferdinand, a natural son of Alphonso the Magnanimous, and his successor to the throne of Naples—both of them harassed in their own states by frequent conspiracies—were privy to this murderous complot: an archbishop, Salviati, and two priests, engaged in the most active part of its execution.

The place chosen for the perpetration of the deed was

* Conspiracy of Olgiati, Visconti, and Lampugnani, A.D. 1476.

† A.D. 1470.

223-6
a church—the time, the awful moment of the elevation of the host.

Julian fell pierced by nineteen wounds on the steps of the altar, but Lorenzo extricated himself from the hands of the assassins ; his partisans rallied round him—and the dispersed conspirators, to the number of four hundred, paid with their lives the forfeit of their ill-digested attempt. The seas and the mountains afforded no shelter against the vengeance of Medici.

The failure of repeated conspiracies at Rome and Naples had led to analogous results—to cement the power against which their efforts were aimed.

Since the reign of Boniface VIII., in the age of Dante, the temporal power of the popes had been, for two centuries, shaken to its foundation. The removal of the papal seat to Avignon, and, subsequently, the endless disputes of the great western schism, had rendered the presence of the pope at Rome a very rare occurrence. The raging feuds of the Roman nobility, and the continual devastations of foreign and national soldiery, had, for all that long interval, spread desolation and anarchy in the States of the Church. The papal supremacy had long ceased to be recognised even in words ; and the liberal municipal institutions which Rome and the principal cities had always preserved under the patronage of their pontiffs, were trampled down by the violence of factions and utterly obliterated.

Long after the close of the great western schism, Nicolas V., a man of haughty and imperious temper, re-established his residence, and re-constituted the papal authority in its absolute supremacy at Rome*. But the memory of their popular liberties still lingered in more than one Roman breast. Stefano Porcari, a noble citizen, dared to raise a voice for the revival of the ancient rights

* A.D. 1447.

of the Roman people. He engaged in unsuccessful insurrections and conspiracies, which ended at length in his own destruction, and in that of his numerous accomplices*.

In the midst of a trembling population was the papal power thus definitively settled in the capital by a deed of bloodshed.

The unswerving ambition and animosity of the fierce Sixtus IV., the unscrupulous perfidiousness of the profligate Alexander VI., and the warlike ambition of the haughty Julius II., brought about the final dispersion of the proudest Roman barons and the extinction of the petty tyrants of Romagna, and put an end to all pretensions of foreign powers to the territories of the church.

Thus, of the great number of independent states that had been flourishing ever since the earliest dawn of Italian liberty, five large and almost equally balanced divisions remained towards the end of the fifteenth century: Milan, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples. The lords of Mantua and Ferrara, the Dukes of Savoy, and the republics of Lucca and Siena, followed the destinies of their more powerful neighbours.

Had any of these five principal powers possessed sufficient strength and activity to draw all the others after its political views; or had they, with mutual understanding, joined in a common alliance against common dangers, Italy, deprived as it was of all public spirit, of all national cohesive vitality, might still offer a generous resistance against the ultra-montane nations that were about to renew, in that country, all the horrors of the Vandalic invasions. But their mutual suspicions and jealousies, the narrow-minded views of a cowardly policy, involved these potentates in a maze of diplomatic intrigues, in which, under pretext of maintaining a just equilibrium between

* A.D. 1453.

them, they conspired against each other's tranquillity, until one of them, seized by a sudden panic, had recourse to the fatal measure of calling in a foreign auxiliary.

While thus Italy, divided, disarmed, enslaved, lay at the mercy of her tyrants, all around the circle of the Alps, from the north, from the east and west, nations which had hitherto been either hardly known by name, or distracted by factions and wars, appeared, now suddenly reorganised, to become gigantic, and all at once, by a fatal providence, joined in her ruin.

The Swiss, whose very name was as yet utterly new in Italy, elated by their exploits at Granson and Morat, began to look down from their Alpine regions and covet the sunny lands of Lombardy, that lay in all their tempting luxuriance at their feet. Complying with the imprudent request of Pope Sixtus IV., the rude mountaineers of the canton of Uri had already entered the territory of Milan, and engaged in a skirmish against the ducal troops at Giornico, which had proved fatal to the Italian arms*.

The German empire had been restored to a better state of order and union under the house of Austria; and Maximilian, who had, by his marriage with Mary of Burgundy, laid the foundation of the greatness of his more fortunate successor, Charles V., was ready to urge his pretensions upon Italy, grounded on rights of imperial supremacy, which his predecessors had foregone ever since the age of Frederic II.

Charles VII. of France had, through the almost miraculous intervention of a virgin heroine, reconquered from the English his fairest provinces. Louis XI. had since humbled and chastised the arrogance of his rebellious vassals, added Provence and Flanders to the French crown, and fixed the confines of his monarchy nearly to their present extent. England rested herself from a hundred years of continental

* A.D. 1479.

wars, and from her long civil dissensions under the despotic sway of the house of Tudor. France, secure from that quarter, had leisure to come forward to the vindication of her claims on the kingdom of Naples and the duchy of Milan; and the youthful ambition of Charles VIII. was already irremovably bent on schemes of conquest.

The crowns of Arragon, Castile, and Sicily, had been united by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella*, and their combined efforts had driven from the Peninsula the Moors of Grenada†: a bastard branch of the house of Arragon already reigned at Naples; and the pretext of affinity was soon to give the Spanish monarchs a right to interfere in the affairs of that kingdom.

Finally, the Turks, led by a succession of heroes, having accomplished the final overthrow of the Eastern empire, under Mahomet II., had established themselves on the banks of the Bosphorus‡; and their victorious fleets had spread a sudden consternation all along the Mediterranean coasts. Already the crescent had been seen ominously gleaming on the Italian lands as far as Aquileia§; while, in the south, the lieutenants of Mahomet II. had surprised and stormed the sea-port of Otranto||.

The building-up of all the other nations of Europe was the undoing of Italy.

The times being thus too fatally favourable to the consummation of our ultimate ruin, Ludovico Sforza, called *Il Moro*, sent an invitation to Charles VIII. of France to cross the Alps to the conquest of Naples.

After the assassination of Galeazzo Sforza, in 1476, Gian Galeazzo, his son, a child of eight years of age, peaceably succeeded to his father in the Dukedom, under the regency of Bona of Savoy, his mother. But the uncles of the young duke, especially Ludovic the Moor, taking

* A.D. 1469.

† A.D. 1492.

‡ A.D. 1453.

§ A.D. 1478.

|| A.D. 1480.

advantage of the imbecility of the minor, and of the helplessness of the regent, wrested from their hands the sceptre of Milan, and, under the specious pretext of paternal tutorage, kept his languishing nephew in close confinement. Ferdinand of Naples, who had married a Neapolitan princess to the much-wronged young duke, threatened to interfere in his favour, and march his forces against the unnatural usurper. Ludovic saw his danger, and thought of averting it by conjuring up the storm that was to involve his own in the fate of his country.

Charles VIII. of France, a young and sickly, but vain and presumptuous monarch, with a mind surfeited with all the inanities of chivalrous legends, resolved on rivalling the exploits of Charlemagne and St. Louis, looked upon Naples only as a starting point, whence he intended to sail for his conquest of Palestine. The time had come to bring forward his titles to the crown of Naples as a successor of the house of Anjou. Ludovic the Moor had heated his youthful fancy by representing to him the facility of that conquest.

Nowhere, in fact, could the French army meet with any serious resistance.

Savoy and Montferrat, the great guardians of the Alps, were at that time governed by women. The republic of Genoa, subjected to the Dukes of Milan ever since the times of the Archbishop John Visconti, opened all its fortresses to the invading enemy. The republic of Venice, anxious about its eastern possessions, seemed bent on keeping its neutrality, and induced the Lords of Ferrara and Mantua to enter into its views. Lorenzo de Medici had died at the head of a quiescent republic in 1492; and his son Piero, by coveting rather the appearance than the reality of power, had abandoned the line of policy of his predecessors, and undermined a supremacy that was based merely on popular partiality. With a cowardice and pre-

cipitation that cost him his expulsion from Florence, he gave up to the French the strongholds of the Apennines.

Pope Alexander, wholly intent on the aggrandisement of his son Cæsar Borgia, was but a faithless and powerless supporter of his threatened ally.

King Ferdinand of Naples had broken the charm that had attached the Neapolitans to his father, Alphonso the Magnanimous. His long reign had been spent in ineffectual struggles to quench the ever-springing conspiracies of his disaffected barons. The fate of Niccolò Piccinino, one of the greatest condottieri, whom he had put to death by an unheard-of perfidy, had alienated from Naples all the soldiers of adventure on whom that court might still rely for a steady defence. The kingdom was discordant and exhausted; numerous Neapolitan exiles followed the standards of France; frequent seditions broke out in the capital on the very eve of the French passing the frontier. Meanwhile Ferdinand had died early in the year 1494. Alphonso II., his son, and Ferdinand II., his grandson, were panic-struck at the approach of the enemy. They deserted their posts one after another, with unaccountable precipitation.

Naples was lost—nor was a sword unsheathed, or a lance broken, in its defence. Thus had Italian independence irretrievably perished*.

The French were indeed driven out of the country in as great a hurry as they had been imprudently let in. The ever-restless anxiety of Ludovic the Moor, the wary though temporising policy of the Venetian senate, the jealousy of Spain and Germany, armed the league of Venice to the destruction of France. Charles VIII. retraced his way hastily and confusedly towards the north. Italy started up new enemies at every step on the path of the fugitive.

* Feb. 1495.

Arrested on the banks of the Taro by the army of the Milanese and Venetian allies, commanded by the Marquis of Mantua, the French fought with the courage of despair. The battle of Fornovo was the first, since the time of the Lombard league, where the Italians found themselves in the presence of a foreign foe, and they never since, as a nation, reappeared on the field. Charles made good his escape; a twelvemonth after that conquest there was not a Frenchman left in the country they had so readily overpowered*.

But the cataract had been broken open, and the inundation could no longer be checked. The charm of the invincibility of the Italian military school had vanished, and Italy appeared in all her unwarlike nudity. The delights of her soil and climate, the luxuries of her wealthy communities, the riches of her temples and palaces, had been revealed to the eager eye of her wondering neighbours; they all raved with impatience to secure their share in the prey.

The short-sighted and selfish policy of her pusillanimous governments was confounded by the novelty and gravity of the event. As it happens but too often among the victims of a sudden disaster, they provided for their own safety by the sacrifice of their natural allies. They sat silent and passive on the downfall of their brothers, unaware that every hour hastened the maturity of their own. Nay, more! they sued for the aid of a foreign sword to bring down their rivals, nor saw that that sword had two edges, and struck blindly and mercilessly against friend and foe.

The storm now gathered around the head of the first promoter of that national calamity.

Nothing daunted by the reverses of his predecessor, Louis XII. led the French to the conquest of Milan, which

* Battle of Fornovo, July 6, 1495.

his vanguard was alone sufficient to achieve*. Ludovic the Moor, abandoned and betrayed by his Swiss mercenaries at Novara, fell into the hands of his enemies, and died, after a long captivity in France.

Meanwhile, the monarchs of Spain and France agreed on the partition of the kingdom of Naples, to the exclusion of their ally and its legitimate heir, Don Frederic, the last prince of the Arragonese house of Naples, who also died a captive in France; but that unnatural compact between two emulous nations could not last long. Hostilities broke forth between France and Spain, and Gonzalvo of Cordova secured for his master the entire possession of the realm†.

Next came the turn of Venice.

A compact had already been entered into between Louis XII. and Maximilian of Austria, for the partition of the Venetian *terra firma*, since the year 1504. But the ambition of the warlike Pope Julius II. raised up new enemies against Venice, and nearly all the powers of Europe signed the League of Cambray‡. The Republic, all alone, menaced by so powerful a coalition, showed itself worthy of her ancient renown. Her troops fought the French gloriously, yet disastrously, at Agnadello§: they drove from Padua Maximilian of Austria, and his host of one hundred thousand combatants. Their magnanimous defence reconciled the good-will of the French monarch and the proud heart of Julius II., and Venice was allowed to come out safe and sound from that unequal contest. But her vital strength was gone; her influence as a continental power was lost for ever; and limiting herself to a passive, defenceless policy at home, she prepared herself for that long and noble struggle which awaited her in the East.

The League of Cambray was followed by the Holy League.

* A.D. 1499.

† A.D. 1503.

‡ League of Cambray, A.D. 1509.

§ Battle of Agnadello, May 14, 1509.

Julius II. called on the Italian states to join him in his generous but illusory scheme of driving the barbarians out of Italy. The lieutenants of Louis XII., attacked by the Swiss, Spanish, and Italian confederates, notwithstanding their high-purchased victory of Ravenna, were ultimately compelled to evacuate the country*.

But the struggle was soon renewed at the accession of the two formidable rivals, Francis I. and Charles V. From the battle of Marignano† to the rout of Pavia‡, the plains of Lombardy were turned into a vast battle-field, until the captivity of Francis I. laid the whole country at the discretion of his fortunate antagonist.

Only two years afterwards, a band of Spanish and German robbers, led by a renegade traitor, stormed and ravaged Rome in the name of Charles V. From that day the haughty pontiffs of Rome were made aware that, like the rest of Italy, their very existence was at the mercy of foreigners. There was one more short struggle at Florence, and then all was submission and silence.

The downfall of Italy was embittered by the virulent accusations of her foreign dominators, who loudly proclaimed that that nation only met with the fate that its cowardice and perfidy fully deserved.

Woe to the conquered!

The subjugation of a country, whose different states never, but on one fortuitous occasion, fought under the same banner, accomplished by the combined attacks of three colossal powers, was attributed to the unwarlike and pusillanimous disposition of its inhabitants. In vain did the last remains of Italian militia lavishly bleed at Agnadello, at Padua, at Ravenna, and on the Garigliano. In vain did Hector Fieramosca and his twelve followers chas-

* Battle of Ravenna, death of Gaston de Foix, April 11, 1512.

† Rout of the Swiss at Marignano, September 13, 1515.

‡ Battle of Pavia, capture of Francis I., February 24, 1525.

tise the taunting arrogance of an equal number of French men-at-arms in the private encounter at Barletta*. The ugly stain of cowardice was indelibly inflicted on the Italian name, nor ever since that day has it ceased to brand our national character.

The arts of cunning and perfidy, and the double dealings and falsehoods with which foreigners so bitterly reproached the Italian princes in the fifteenth century, might, perhaps, have been excusable on the part of weak and defenceless governments brought all at once into an unequal contest with widely superior forces. But when we see the lion stooping to the wiles of the fox; when we see Spain and France coolly parting between them the states of their confiding Neapolitan ally; and again France and Germany conspiring to the extinction of inoffensive Venice; and the honest Swiss, not only basely deserting, but even delivering the fugitive Ludovic the Moor into the hands of relentless foes; and the French aiding the Pisans to shake off their yoke, only to sell them back again to the Florentines whenever it suited their interests:—when we read of so many treaties and alliances shamelessly broken, of so many flagrant defections, complots, and treacheries, we must confess that French, Germans, and Spaniards, were but too soon initiated in that crooked policy of which they so loudly complained, whilst they could not even allege a state of weakness and helplessness as an extenuation of their duplicity. But perfidy and duplicity remained among the characteristic traits of the Italian nature; and foreigners, in general, make it a duty to look upon every person they meet, on their way through our country, as a professor of the unprincipled doctrines of Cæsar Borgia or Macchiavello.

The deeds of sanguinary execution, by which the conquest of Italy was accomplished or secured, were utterly new and unexampled in the annals of the country, even

* Combat of thirteen Italians against as many French warriors at Barletta, A.D. 1503.

among the darkest records of the barbaric invasions. The French, never shrinking from any open violation of the rights of nations, surprised and stormed Capua, while a parley was going on, butchered seven thousand unarmed citizens in the streets, and committed every brutal outrage on their defenceless wives and daughters*. Louis XII., after granting an honourable capitulation to Genoa, sent the doge and the principal citizens to the scaffold, thus punishing their heroic devotion to the cause of their country†. The same monarch, irritated by the delay occasioned by the manly resistance of the towns of Peschiera and Caravaggio, hung their commanders on the battlements of their citadels, and put to the sword their surrendering garrisons‡. A French officer beset with fire the mouth of a cavern, wherein the women and children of Vicenza had taken refuge, during the wars of the League of Cambray, and nearly six thousand of these innocent victims perished among the cruel agonies of suffocation§.

Such were the exploits of a king and a nation who boasted of having signalised their age by the revival of chivalry. The morals of the country were shocked by the constant perpetration of such nefarious outrages. The hunted-down population had scarcely any resource left but the dagger and poison. Yet even the arts of assassination and treason were brought into Italy, or, at least, carried into perfection by foreigners, if at least we are to believe that Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI., was a Spaniard, and the Constable of Bourbon a Frenchman. But as a ferocious and sanguinary propensity is always found combined with dastardly timidity, no nation has ever been impeached with more wanton cruelty and bloody-mindedness than the Italians. The poniard is said to be essentially a national weapon, from their proudest noble to the bandit of

* A.D. 1506.

† A.D. 1507.

‡ A.D. 1509.

§ A.D. 1510.

the Apennines; and ever since the death of the Dauphin of Francis I., not a poisoned cup has been administered without an Italian being in some manner or other suspected to be privy to the deed.

The free and easy manners of republican Italy were superseded by the gorgeous style and the gross adulation of foreign courtiers. The very language of Dante was diluted into the empty phrases of a pompous grandiloquence; and the awkward mode of addressing the third person was imported from Spain, and naturalised into the Italian *lei*, a mode of speech, till the sixteenth century, unknown in Italy. Still the Italians are pretended to be the inventors of every kind of servility of language; and their cringing, coaxing, fawning manners are a theme of the constant reproach of their European brothers, who think they have reason to argue from it the unfairness and meanness, the emasculation and degeneracy of their national character.

Woe to the conquered!

The lustre of their Italian name faded with the loss of its independent existence. The vices and crimes, which were either engrafted on them by their foreign invaders, or were only the consequence of oppression and vassalage, were laid to the charge of the fallen race, and became their characteristic distinction.

From that general wreck of Italian nationality, only two of the principal ancient states still preserved a precarious and, to a great extent, nominal independence—Venice and Genoa; and four new, or newly aggrandised states, arose to an ephemeral and tinsel lustre—Savoy, Ferrara, Tuscany, and Rome. These were all destined to dispute against each other the prominence on the stage of Italian politics, always under the influence of some of the great potentates who exercised, by turns, a paramount authority over the country. We shall have occasion to witness their prosperity, and gradual decline, during the period of Italian principalities, which we next propose to examine. Mean-

while, it remains for us to show, in a few words, the situation in which each of those states found itself at the close of the glorious epoch which we have hitherto traced down to its expiration—the epoch of Italian liberty and independence.

Since the deadly experiment of the war of Chiozza* had given the republic of Venice a wide superiority over Genoa; and the continental wars, by which that state overcame Francesco da Carrara, lord of Padua, Vicenza, and Verona†, and conquered Brescia and Bergamo from the Dukes of Milan‡, had secured it the possession of a vast territory in *terra firma*, Venice, elated by success, anticipated the moment in which she might assert her supreme influence, if not her absolute sovereignty, over all Italy. With a disinterestedness of patriotic feelings, which aristocracy alone is wont to foster and strengthen, the Venetian nobles not only lavished their blood and fortunes to the promotion of their national glory, but even voluntarily renounced the privileges of their rank, and the inalienable rights of men, submitting to a violent, arbitrary, iron rule; that their government, relying on absolute unanimity and security at home, might boldly and freely pursue its conquests abroad.

The warlike Francesco Foscari, invested with the supreme dignity of the state, beheld with more than Spartan firmness the repeated tortures that the dark Council of Ten inflicted on his ill-fated son. A year after his son's demise, the doge himself had become obnoxious to that suspicious tribunal, to which the chief magistrate of the republic was no less subjected than the meanest of citizens. Without uttering one word of murmuring or complaint, the nonagenarian hero deposed a sceptre, which he had wielded with so much honour for thirty-four years, and died broken-

* A.D. 1378—1381.

† A.D. 1404, 1405.

‡ A.D. 1427—1430.

hearted, as it were, on the steps of his throne, as the peals of the bells of St. Mark announced the inauguration of his successor*.

Antonio Grimani, who was cast into irons on his return from an unsuccessful expedition in the Levant†, forgetting his country's injustice in the hour of danger, with a magnanimity of which Victor Pisani had, a century before, given such a signal example, passed from his dungeon to the command of the Venetian forces, and restored, by his presence, the fortune and confidence of the republic.

Andrea Gritti, one of the most conspicuous Venetian generals, had given such high testimonials of a rare heroism in many encounters by sea, and by land, at the battle of Agnadello, as to command the respect and admiration of his French and Ottoman enemies. A prisoner at Constantinople, in 1503, and in France, in 1513, he knew how to turn those friendly feelings to the advantage of his country; and from the loneliness of his captivity he was enabled to negotiate a peace with Bajazet II. and Louis XII., on such terms as Venice could hardly have dared to anticipate.

Such was the spirit of true greatness by which the lion of St. Mark was still animated; by such traits of republican virtue it sustained itself during the long struggle against the Turks from 1463 to 1503; and against the French, during the Cambray and Holy Leagues, from 1508 to 1516.

But it lay now weary, prostrate, and bleeding. The wounds which it had scarcely felt during the heat of action now burst open afresh, and it was made to feel, in its full extent, the utter exhaustion of its forces. Still there was life around its heart; and during the whole course of the sixteenth century we shall see it renewing its frequent struggles against its Mussulman antagonists, and making the last stand in Italy in favour of freedom of thought.

* A.D. 1457.

† A.D. 1499.

The reverses of the wars of the Bosphorus and of Chiozza, by which Genoa was ultimately compelled to give up the empire of the eastern seas to her ancient foe, and the endless anarchy of her fiery nobility had induced the Genoese people to implore the protection of the house of Visconti.

After the death of John Visconti, archbishop of Milan, Genoa had thrown off the yoke, and asserted her independence. The sanguinary feuds, however, of two emulous families, the Fregosi and Adorni*, soon made the Genoese feel the necessity of a foreign arbiter and pacificator. They offered the supreme dominion of their city to Charles VI. of France, hoping that the rule of a distant and feeble monarch would bring them to order and peace without encroaching upon their popular liberties. Gian Galeazzo Visconti, who, towards the year 1400, had succeeded in extending his sway over all Lombardy, recovered the rights of his family over Genoa, and the city continued to receive its first magistrates from his sons, Gian Maria and Filippo Maria, without, however, allowing their liege sovereigns to interfere in their internal or external policy.

The republic of Genoa espoused the cause of the house of Anjou against Alphonso the Magnanimous, and humbled the pride of its ancient rivals, the Catalonians and Arragoneses, in a naval conflict at Ponza, where Alphonso himself was taken prisoner, and conveyed in triumph to Genoa and Milan†. Filippo Maria Visconti, moved either by an unwonted feeling of generosity, or by political views, set the captive monarch, unransomed, at liberty. The Genoese, who very justly considered Alphonso as their own prisoner, indignant at this arbitrary act, rose in rebellion, and refused their allegiance to a sovereign who had no power to enforce it.

* A.D. 1382—1386.

† A.D. 1439.

But Genoa was neither yet thoroughly schooled to servitude, nor fit for a peaceful enjoyment of freedom. The people could find no rest from the ravages of contending parties, but by recurring to a remedy worse than the worst of evils—foreign interference.

They again placed their Republic under the protection of the French crown in 1458, and were governed by the princes of the house of Anjou, until, wearied with their yoke, in 1461, they revolted against their self-imposed rulers, and destroyed a French army that was sent to recall them to obedience.

Three years later they renounced their high-purchased independence, captivated by the fame of the valour and magnanimity of Francesco Sforza, and voluntarily returned to their allegiance to Milan. The revolting brutality of his son, Galeazzo, soon gave them reason to repent their hasty submission. A conspiracy was entered into by many of the Genoese patricians*, directed by Girolamo Gentile, whose object it was to rouse the populace to massacre the Milanese authorities. The attempt proved unsuccessful, and many of the conspirators were immolated to the tyrant's revenge. But Galeazzo Sforza fell at last under the daggers of his assassins, and Genoa was not slow in providing for its emancipation.

At the epoch of the descents of Charles VIII. and Louis XII., Genoa followed the fortunes of Ludovic the Moor, and was involved in that usurper's fall. The French lieutenants of Louis XII., unable to appreciate the importance of popular rights, did not hesitate to trample down those municipal institutions which the Milanese despots had always respected. Genoa was subjected to a military rule, and harassed by the most violent extortions, until the exasperated population rose into a unanimous revolt, and drove out the French*. Louis XII. was obliged to march

* A.D. 1476.

† A.D. 1507.

his whole army against the refractory city, and delivered it up to the most appalling military execution.

Since that time the republic of Genoa, willing or unwilling, followed the fortunes of France.

It suffered severely during the frequent reverses of the French armies in Italy. It was ravaged for many days with incredible fury by the Spaniards, who took it by surprise in 1522.

The Genoese navy, commanded by Andrea Doria, was the best support of the French power at sea. Filippino Doria, his nephew, obtained, in the name of France, a signal victory over the imperial forces, in the Gulph of Salerno*, whilst the French armies were giving way before a continuation of every calamity on shore.

While these Genoese heroes were lavishing their blood for the service of France, the rule of that government weighed harder and harder on their unfortunate country. Andrea Doria demanded no other reward for his services than the restoration of his native republic. His just claims were disregarded by France. He passed over to Austria. He led his victorious galleys to Genoa: his presence alone was sufficient to rouse his countrymen to revolt. He proclaimed the independence of the republic in the name of Charles V. In the name of that emperor, whose fatal prosperity had given the death-blow to all that remained of Italian freedom, Doria asserted the restored liberty of Genoa†.

With a blind partiality for the proud city on which all his patriotic feelings were concentrated, the Genoese admiral followed, with a rare fidelity, the standards of the destroyer of Italy. During his long contest against Francis I., and in his expeditions to Algiers and Tunis, Doria was the right arm of Charles V. For his co-operation against France, Rome, Venice, and Turkey; for his steady compliance with all the measures that matured the fate of

* A.D. 1528.

† A.D. 1529.

Italy, he only asked the faculty of disposing, at his pleasure, of what he considered to be his country.

Genoa was indisputably his.

Had his ambition wanted the absolute sovereignty of that state, he was sure of the approbation and support of his master, and of the ready acquiescence of his countrymen.

He preferred to restore to Genoa its republican franchises.

He reorganised the state under the form of a temperate aristocracy, under that government which appeared to him, and which was, perhaps, in that age and country, the most secure and plausible. Towards the close of his career, Doria, "the Genoese Washington," retired from public life, and resumed the habits of a private citizen. Genoa enjoyed a long and profound peace, of which the conspiracy of Fiesco* had scarcely power to ruffle the surface.

But the commerce of Genoa had long since suffered the severest losses. What had been left to the Genoese of their possessions in the Levant by their Venetian and Catalonian rivals, was utterly destroyed by the Turks. Their colonies at Pera and Caffa were put to the sword by Mahomet II., and his successors†; and even their last possession of Corsica began to be warmly disputed by the frequent insurrections of those fierce islanders, led by the high-minded Sampiero.

Since the expulsion of the sons of Lorenzo de Medici, at the epoch of the invasion of Charles VIII., Florence was distracted by religious and political factions. Chance had sent to that city a Dominican monk of Ferrara, that Girolamo Savonarola, lawgiver and reformer, about whom, whether he was a self-deceiving enthusiast or a designing impostor, the world will not soon agree.

Previous to the death of Lorenzo de Medici, (some pretend under his auspices,) he had commenced his eccentric

* A.D. 1547.

† A.D. 1453—1475.

mission, and had stood unrelenting at the deathbed of that accomplished "Florentine Pericles," who, in the misgivings of his last hour, sued in vain for the haughty friar's benediction. As soon as Florence had rid herself of Piero de Medici and his brothers, the party of Savonarola obtained a wide ascendancy over the multitude; and, proclaiming Jesus Christ king of Florence, established a theo-democratic government, before which the semi-pagan, libertine association of courtiers, poets, and scholars, that used to crowd the halls of the house of Medici, were forced to bend in humiliation and terror. The fanatical pulpit demagogue, who has been by many writers called the precursor of Luther, availing himself of the general anxiety created in Italy by the descent of the French—an event which he took upon himself the merit of having predicted—preached and enforced a universal reform. A reaction in favour of the exiled family, attempted by some of their favourers in 1497, was punished with death. The easy, and not unfrequently profligate, life of many of the young aristocracy, was visited with the severest censure. A bonfire was made in the public square of what were called profane books and paintings, with irreparable detriment to letters and arts.

Finally, Savonarola directed his attacks against the source itself of all corruption—the court of Rome.

Pope Alexander VI., seeing the inefficiency of spiritual weapons, set against him the Augustinians, an order of monks inimical to the Dominicans. The champions of the two orders had a long war of words from their pulpits. Their partisans lighted a pile in the square of Florence, to test the veracity of their tenets and the firmness of their courage. The unsatisfactory result of that tremendous ordeal proved fatal to the credit of Savonarola; he was given up by his adherents, and consigned to the flames*.

* Savonarola, born at Ferrara, of an illustrious family of Padua, A.D.

The republic was organised under a milder and wiser rule by the Gonfaloniere Piero Soderini, soon after the death of the Dominican friar.

It was about this epoch that the counsels of the republic began to feel the influence of the sound and mighty intellect of Macchiavello*.

This modest, virtuous, and moderate citizen, contented with humble and subordinate offices in a republic where his illustrious ancestors had repeatedly filled the highest dignities, willingly allowed his superiors to avail themselves of his rare talents, and yielded to them the merit of the measures which he alone had the ability to suggest.

He was the first in Italy to feel the imprudence of committing the safety of the state to the defence of mercenary adventurers, and to recommend the institution of a national militia, which, no doubt, powerfully contributed to retard, and might perhaps have utterly averted, the last downfall of Florence, had it been fully and opportunely adopted.

His frequent embassies to the courts of Rome and France, and his long mission to Cæsar Borgia, gave him that frightful insight of human nature, and of those detestable arts of policy, of which he has been but too generally believed to be the discoverer and promoter in Europe. Macchiavello, however, invented nothing;—with a mind perfectly dead to all enthusiasm, he took a calm, cold, and rather misanthropic survey of the human family, and described it as he saw it, with a placid though appalling fidelity—with an impartial though disheartening neutrality.

1452; a Dominican monk in his 14th year; his arrival at Florence, 1489. Trial by fire proposed by Friar Mariano da Genazano, a Franciscan, and accepted by Domenico Buonvicino, a Dominican, April 17, 1498. Death of Savonarola, May 23, 1498.

* Macchiavello, born May 3, 1459; appointed secretary, 1498; ambassador to the court of France, 1500; to Cæsar Borgia, 1502; to Pope Julius II., 1503; to France, 1504; to Julius II., 1506; to the Emperor Maximilian, 1507—1508; to France, 1510—1511; persecuted by the Medici, 1512.

There was in Italy, in that age, among the cultivated classes, little political, and no religious belief.

The perpetual vicissitudes of factions had taught the greatest number of men to blend their personal interests with their warmest patriotic feelings.

Macchiavello, gifted with an essentially active mind, sought, in public life, rather employment than either power or fame, or much less honours and wealth. He was one of the most disinterested men that ever lived; and if he never perhaps loved any living being, neither did he certainly love himself; nor did he ever turn those powers for which he has been so much praised and abused, to raise himself in the world. His delight was in sounding the depths of the human heart. He wished to appreciate men after their positive value; and from this dangerous knowledge he derived nothing for himself but the melancholy advantage of being entitled to despise both the oppressor and the oppressed—the prince and his subjects.

He was as good as a man can be without love or belief.

Certainly, never were two epochs more diametrically opposed to each other than the age of Savonarola and the age of Macchiavello; and yet this last made his entrance on the political stage just as the other made his melancholy exit.

The efforts of the Florentine republic, ever since it was delivered from the Medici, were pertinaciously turned to the conquest of Pisa, which had availed herself of the patronage of Charles VIII. to vindicate her independence. From 1499 to 1509, the Florentines carried on their unnatural hostilities. Every year, with a refined inveteracy, they laid waste the Pisan territory with a view to reduce the town by famine. The French and Spaniards, who profited by that brotherly enmity, by turns offered their alliance, and sent men and subsidies to the besieged. Finally, Florence, by the most tempting offers, purchased

from France the right of enslaving the emulous city. A new emigration and rapid depopulation ensued. Pisa sank under this last calamity to rise no more.

Meanwhile, Florence, scarcely less exhausted, awaited her just retribution. Their constant alliance with France had incensed the wrath of the irascible Julius II., who, after the battle of Ravenna, resolved to punish the Florentines by restoring the Medici into their city.

Of the three sons of Lorenzo de Medici, Piero, the eldest, had died in 1503, at the epoch of the disastrous retreat of the French at the Garigliano. Giovanni, the cardinal, (afterwards Leo X.,) and Julian, duke of Nemours, the two surviving brothers, marched at the rear-guard of a disorderly band of Spanish marauders that Julius sent to the conquest of Florence. On their first arrival they surprised and took Prato, and gave it up to the ravages of an unruly soldiery. The terror that the massacre of Prato struck among the defenders of Florence induced them to capitulate, and the Medici were restored to their native city after eighteen years of exile *.

The ancient adversaries of the family of Medici rallied. They entered into a conspiracy, which was soon detected, and which cost some of the most distinguished citizens their lives. Macchiavello was apprehended among the number, and put to the torture. He stood the ordeal with his wonted calmness and constancy. No confession could be extorted from him, and perhaps he had nothing to confess; perhaps his guilt, as well as that of his accomplices, had no better foundation than the famous Catholic plot, in the days of Charles II., in England.

Leo X., at his accession †, proclaimed a general amnesty, and gave orders for the release of his prisoners.

After the exaltation of Leo, Julian, his youngest brother,

* A.D. 1512.

† A.D. 1513.

ruled as his lieutenant at Florence till the year 1516. After the death of Julian, the pope placed at the head of the Republic Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, son of his eldest brother, Piero. Lorenzo having also died, in 1519, Florence was governed by the Cardinal Giulio de Medici, a natural son of that Julian who perished in the Pazzi conspiracy. Cardinal Giulio was afterwards exalted to the papal chair*, under the name of Clement VII.

This weak, crafty, and unprincipled pontiff, who, by his alliance with the French, had called down upon himself the resentment of Charles V., and exposed the metropolis of Christendom to the awful ravages of the lawless followers of the Constable of Bourbon†, now, taking advantage of the peace of Cambray, which laid the whole country at the mercy of the Austrian conqueror, and providing for his own safety by the treaty of Barcelona, abandoned the French, his former allies—the power, splendour, and dignity of the church—the general interests of Italy—to conciliate the good-will of the minion of fortune. At the moment of conferring upon Charles V., at Bologna, the golden crown of the Roman empire, and the iron crown of the Lombards‡, Clement asked no favour in return but the conqueror's cooperation in bringing his native town to obedience.

The tidings of the storming of Rome by Bourbon's army had no sooner reached Florence, than the lovers of liberty had, without resistance, driven the lieutenants of Clement from their towns, and established their popular government. The antique virtues of republican Tuscany seemed

* A.D. 1523.

† Storming of Rome by the armies of Charles V.; death of the Constable of Bourbon, their leader; dreadful pillage and devastation, which lasted nine months. May 6th, 1527.

‡ Charles V., crowned by the pope at Bologna, Feb. 22, and March 24, 1530.

at once revived for a final experiment. At the first dawning of this ephemeral liberty, the most active and influential citizens returned from the land of exile, or from their inglorious retreats.

Macchiavello, who, under the Medici, had been condemned to neglect and inaction, though he evinced no repugnance to offer his services to his country, whatever might be the ruling faction, opened now his heart to a hope that his talents might be of some avail to the Republic. But public feeling was against him. He was thought a lukewarm friend of the cause of his country, and looked upon with mistrust. His upright mind sank under this undeserved disgrace, and he was brought by chagrin to an immature end. The warmest defenders of Florence, too late made aware of their injustice, gathered around him. From a bed of sickness, the dying statesman and citizen, too great to give way to any feeling of personal resentment, raised his voice for his country, and his last words were of applause and encouragement to its restorers*.

Macchiavello recommended, above all measures, the reorganisation of the national militia, and exhorted his friends to proceed with concord and firmness.

The Florentines were firm and unanimous.

Never had that city displayed so much zeal or disinterested patriotism—never brought forward such inexhaustible resources. The citizens were mustered up in several bands of hardy infantry, which rivalled each other in activity and vigilance. Men of letters, artists, and scholars, left their peaceful avocations to range themselves under the standard of the Republic.

The gigantic mind of the greatest of ancient and modern artists, Michael Angelo, lent his powerful aid to the erection of bulwarks and batteries for the protection of his

* Death of Macchiavello, June 22, 1522.

native walls. He was charged with repeated missions to Ferrara, to study new models of fortification, and was even made one of the ten leaders of the military forces.

There was a moment, it is said, when, in a fit of spite or despondency, (we will never say, of fear,) he deserted his post, and took refuge at Ferrara and Venice. But this was long before the hour of danger pressed hard upon Florence. Ere the papal and imperial allies had laid siege to his native town, he sued for a reconciliation with the magistrates, and hastened back to take his share in the forthcoming events.

And now the Spanish and German bands invaded the vale of Arno, and laid waste the beautiful plain of Ripoli, pitching their tents under the very walls of Florence. Against the numberless hosts of her besiegers, Florence had no friend in or out of Italy. Resistance, under such circumstances, was almost insanity, and yet Florence resisted.

Francesco Ferruccio, one of the leaders of the militia, a man of superior intelligence and rare intrepidity, still kept the field in the open country, and, with undisciplined bands, performed such prodigies of valour as could hardly be expected from the best experienced veterans. He fell in at length with a large body of German cavalry at Gavignana, and, compelled to give battle under disadvantageous circumstances, he was cut to pieces, with nearly the whole of his band. (Aug. 2.)

Meanwhile, within the walls, famine, plague, and treason hastened the fatal day of Florence.

A sullen determination, such as despair alone is apt to engender, had seized the rulers of the beleaguered city; they resolved never to yield to any extremity, and to bury themselves with their families amidst the ruins of their country. Malatesta Baglioni, one of the mercenary leaders whom the Republic held in its pay, understood nothing of that heroic resolution, and entered into secret negotiations with the besiegers, to avert the fate of those deluded enthu-

siasts, and save them in spite of themselves. He opened the gates to the enemy, and turned his artillery against the town. Florence surrendered after a siege of ten months, August 10th, 1530.

The vengeance of Clement weighed hard and mercilessly upon the conquered. All Italy and Europe were filled with the clamours of thousands of Florentine exiles. Alexander de Medici, a bastard of that family for whom the pope obtained from Charles V. the title of Doge of Florence, was allowed to exercise, for six years, the most revolting tyranny.

After the death of Alexander, who fell a victim to a domestic tragedy, Cosmo, a descendant of Lorenzo, brother of the first Cosmo *Padre della Patria*, was raised to the throne by the intrigues of the friends of his family, among whom the most ardent and active was the historian Guicciardini.

Another and the last effort in favour of the liberty of Florence, was made by a large number of exiles, led by the representatives of the noble families of Salviati, Strozzi, and other inveterate enemies of the name of Medici. But they were routed at Montemurlo*, and their leaders lost their lives on the scaffold.

Filippo Strozzi, the principal hero of that ill-fated expedition, destroyed himself in his dungeon.

With the aid of a French army, Cosmo succeeded in adding Siena to his dominions†, and several years later he was decorated by Pius V. with the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany ‡.

Lucca alone, of all the Tuscan republics, was suffered to continue under its narrow-minded and pusillanimous aristocracy, and lived in utter insignificance and obscurity down to the last catastrophe, which involved its fate in that of Venice and Genoa.

* A.D. 1538.

† A.D. 1534.

‡ A.D. 1569.

During the long reign of Charles V., the usurpations of all the Italian princes received their sanction from the imperial authority.

At the epoch of his coronation at Bologna, Charles V. invested Alphonso of Este with the duchies of Modena and Reggio, which he was to hold as fiefs of the empire. On the same occasion, Alphonso received also from the pope's hands the sovereignty of Ferrara, the ancient seat of his family, the possession of which had been so warmly disputed against him, especially by Julius II., who was bent on the utter extermination of his house.

The Duke of Savoy, and the Marquis of Montferrat, who, from their mountainous districts, had extended their sway over the best part of the Piedmontese territory, and had taken an active part in the wars of Italy as the constant allies of France, now sued for the patronage of Austria, and made their obeisance at Bologna.

The marquisate of Mantua was likewise erected into a duchy, and restored to its ancient possessors, the Gonzaga. But the lustre of that family, as well as that of Montferrat, was soon destined to fade. These principalities were left vacant in consequence of the extinction of the legitimate line, and soon became the subject of fresh contentions, that replunged Italy into those evils from which it had begun to recover.

Meanwhile, the loss of liberty and independence paralysed the active and enterprising spirit that had, until that day, characterised the citizens of republican Italy. All the industry and ingenuity of the Lombard manufacturers were brought to an end by the cruelty and fanaticism, by that strange mixture of oppression and anarchy, that characterised the epoch of the Spanish dominion. The Milanese labourers emigrated by thousands to the neighbouring cantons of Switzerland; and the soil itself, of the richest plain in Europe, lay, for two centuries, uncultivated and sterile.

The buoyant and cheerful disposition of the Florentine merchants underwent a gradual process of enervation and degeneracy under the cruel but crafty rule of the youngest branch of the Medici. The wealth and population of Florence decreased with a frightful rapidity; and Pisa, deprived of her port by the rivalry of Leghorn, did not even preserve the shadow of its former importance. The lowlands of Tuscany, as well as of the Roman campagna, and the Neapolitan coasts of the Adriatic, were turned into unhealthy swamps. Ravenna, Brindisi, Barletta, and the best harbours in the south and east, were gradually filled up and deserted.

The evils of political proscription were followed by the ravages of religious persecution. The Spanish and Roman inquisition, notwithstanding the general resistance with which the Italians repeatedly rose against it, succeeded, at length, in silencing the voice of free opinion, and blasting the vital growth of science and literature.

Poetry, painting, and even music, seemed gradually to obey the influence of that general depression and languor. During the whole of the sixteenth, and a great part of the following century, from the age of Michael Angelo and Leonardo da Vinci to the close of Salvator Rosa's eccentric career, the fine arts underwent an imperceptible and yet irresistible decline.

Activity and brilliancy of mind, loftiness and magnanimity of soul, were still to be found in Italy; but what had formerly appeared to be the common inheritance of the whole of that gifted nation, became the rare and accidental privilege of individuals.

The Venetians and the Genoese alone, as a people, continued to give frequent and luminous proofs of a robust and tenacious vitality. What was in Florence and Ferrara the result of the efforts of ambitious and luxurious princes, was at Genoa and Venice effected by the unanimous exertion of popular energy. It took no less than

two centuries to wrench from the privateers of those two maritime cities the sceptre of the seas, or to force their merchantmen to unlearn their way to the *Scales* of the Levant; nor could their final ruin have ever been accomplished without the important discoveries which gave to the Atlantic so decided an ascendancy over the Mediterranean.

Of this great geographical revolution, the Italians have an undisputed right to claim the first glory. It was principally the daring spirit of Italian exiles and adventurers that brought beyond the Alps and beyond the sea that state of fermentation and disquietude that allowed them no peace in their country. They blended their ardour for trade and commercial enterprise with that love of danger, with that adventurous, devotional, extravagant spirit, that had hitherto been the sole mover of chivalrous enthusiasm.

Columbus was the last of knights.

Catterino Zeno, Barbaro, and Contarini, during their long and perilous missions, wandered far and wide over the Asiatic continent in the same track that their venerable countryman, Marco Polo, had trod two centuries before. Their glowing descriptions of the golden regions of the east awakened the ambition and avarice of the European courts. Portuguese navigators especially, guided by a noble Venetian, Luigi Cadamosto, the first who published a report of those wonderful cruises, had already launched forth on their southern expeditions, when at last the Genoese hero laid open a much wider field of discovery by piloting four humble Spanish caravels to the new hemisphere. Soon the eagerness of nautical enterprise found the limits of the globe too narrow for its daring aspirations. The mariners of Venice and Genoa flocked to the ports of Palos, of Cadiz, and Lisbon, whence it seemed as if the most obscure pilot had only to steer westward or southward, where new stars would welcome

his arrival, and the ocean would start up before him new islands and continents on which to cast his name, sure that that name would remain as long as those new islands and continents should tower over the main.

Of the numberless advantages that Europe was to derive from these maritime discoveries, Italy had only the glory. It was not, perhaps, without providential interposition, that Columbus could not prevail on his native state to enter into his views. It was a tacit mark of acquiescence in the will of Heaven, by which Italy seemed to feel that her maritime race was run, and that nothing was left to her but to lead the way to the future greatness of her more fortunate neighbours.

The names of Columbus, Cadamosto, Amerigo, Verazzano, John and Sebastian Cabot, stand unrivalled among those of the earliest European navigators. Spain, France, England, and Portugal, shared the rich spoils that the ocean had yielded to their genius and daring. Of the vast continent of the New World not an acre of ground fell to the lot of the Italians, not a lump of the ore of its inexhaustible mines—ay, thank God! nor a drop of the blood of its inoffensive inhabitants.

THIRD PERIOD.

ITALIAN PRINCIPALITIES.

CHAPTER I.

MICHAEL ANGELO.

Age of Cosmo de Medici, Poggio, Filelfo, &c.—Princely Patronage—Public Libraries—Printing—Academies—Literary Quarrels—Persecution of Learning—Immoral and Irreligious Tendency of the Age—Age of Lorenzo de Medici—Politiano—Pico della Mirandola—Learned Ladies—Influence of Italy on Learning abroad—Consequences of Foreign Invasions on Literature—Age of Leo X.—The Reformation—The Fine Arts—Michael Angelo.

A LAPSE of nearly one hundred years must be considered as entirely lost in the progress of original Italian literature. Nature had, by a rare phenomenon, given birth to three sovereign minds in the same country, in the same city, and very nearly in the same age, and, by the wisest disposition, so tempered each of them as to suit them to widely different and yet equally important purposes.

But Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio did not flourish alone. Each of them found himself surrounded by a certain number of planets and satellites, which, as they received their light from the supreme luminary, so they were gradually outshone and eclipsed, until they sunk and disappeared in the distance of age.

Thus, in imitation of that Gothic fabric of the Divine Comedy, for which the model could perhaps already be found in the works of Brunetto Latini, Dante's master—other allegorical, metaphysical, encyclopædical poems were produced, some of which have been preserved rather for the curiosity, than either for the edification or the delight of posterity.

In like manner, Petrarch was neither the first nor the last bard of Platonic love, though his school can only be said to have been established two centuries later; and Boccaccio had likewise his precursors and followers, if, at least, we are to believe the assertion, that many if not all the "*Cento Novelle Antiche*" were written before the "*Decameron*," as the "*Pecorone*" of Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, and the "*Novelle*" di Franco Sacchetti were written in imitation of it.

Of all these works, however, and of the various and not unfrequently entertaining vicissitudes of the life of their authors, it enters not into the plan of this work to give an account. Their existence has only been mentioned, lest that great triumvirate might appear rather as an anomaly than a natural consequence of the state of the human mind in Italy during the fourteenth century.

It is not consistent with the laws of nature, that one or a few individuals should reach any considerable eminence without a large retinue of inferior talents, destined to enhance their greatness by a comparative insignificance.

"The loftiest crests of the Alps," as Sismondi observes, "do not rise alone in their middle way to the sky. Chains and ridges branch out in every direction, as if meant for a counterpoise and support to the main Cordillera; but, the farther we recede from them, the inferior eminences are lost in the vastness of the landscape, while those proudest summits rise higher and higher on their gigantic thrones."

But, after the death of the three great Florentines, the

land seemed exhausted and weary. There followed an epoch of superstitious wonderment, of contemplative hesitation. The impulse given by Petrarch and Boccaccio towards the revival of classical literature, laid open before the scholars of the fifteenth century unexplored treasures, which dazzled more than enlightened their still imbecile understanding. They began to apprehend that those generous founders of the national literature had ventured too far without the escort, sometimes even in open violation of the laws, visibly resulting from the models of antiquity.

Petrarch and Boccaccio themselves seemed to have encouraged that illiberal notion—they displayed or affected an unqualified contempt for their Italian juvenile productions, and regretted the time which they had spent otherwise than in the study and imitation of the ancients. These classical researches, which at first were meant only as a secondary object of scholastic pursuit, soon engrossed all their successors' attention and care. To collect, decypher, compare, and transcribe Greek and Latin manuscripts, was the occupation in which men of eminent talent chiefly delighted. To be appointed as a teacher of languages and expounder of ancient texts at one of the new universities of Florence, Pavia, or Naples, became the object of the scholar's ambition. In their more than religious fondness for the writings of the dead, they lost sight of that new literature, fresh, fragrant, and full of life, of which the preceding century had given such promising first-fruits.

They were not unlike the navigators of the same age, who suffered the vastness and importance of the American continent, to which a fortuitous discovery had led them, to withdraw for a time their attention from the primitive object of their nautical enterprises—the road to the East Indies.

Yet even that ardour for classical pursuits—owing, perhaps, to the wars of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, of Ladislaus

of Naples, and of the great western schism—seemed to undergo a temporary intermission.

From the death of Petrarch to the age of Poggio Bracciolini, there runs a considerable interval, which is hardly filled up by any name of note. Coluccio Salutato, an accomplished poet and scholar, a friend of Petrarch, who shared with him the honour of the laurel, survived him several years, and was still living after the close of the fourteenth century. John of Ravenna, the pupil of Petrarch, cherished by him with paternal fondness, and the source of frequent trouble and uneasiness to him, presided for many years over the schools of Padua and Florence, and numbered among his disciples the most conspicuous men of the following age*.

The Greek school which Boccaccio and his master Leontius Pilatus had opened in Florence was soon neglected and deserted. It was only towards the year 1395 that Greek literature was definitely imported into Italy. Emmanuel Chrysoloras, a learned Greek of noble birth, who had been sent to the west to solicit Christian aid in favour of Constantinople, menaced by the Turks, was prevailed upon to remain as a teacher of his native language in Florence, whence he successively passed over to other universities, until, at his death, in 1415, no less than five Italian towns possessed the advantages of a Greek school†.

Meanwhile, the true age of erudition had finally dawned.

Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo, Guarino of Verona, and Aurispa from Sicily, Ambrogio Traversaro, Poggio Braccio-

* Coluccio Salutato, born near Pescia, A.D. 1330; apostolical secretary under Urban V., 1368; Florentine secretary, 1375; died, 1406; the laurel was solemnly laid on his bier. Principal work, "*De nobilitate legum et medicinæ*." Venice, 1542.—John of Ravenna, born 1350; died, 1420.

† Emmanuel Chrysoloras, born at Constantinople, A.D. 1350; ambassador to Venice, 1393; invited to Florence, 1396; died at the Council of Constance, 1415.

lini, and Filelfo at Florence, and Antonio Beccatelli at Naples, vied with each other in their learned enterprises*.

This constitutes that great constellation of scholars which has reflected so great a lustre on the age of Cosmo de Medici, and which has caused the world to attribute to that wealthy citizen the honour of being the first patron and promoter of literature.

It was the fortune of Cosmo and his descendants, as it was with Augustus and Mæcenæ in Rome, to attach their names to the proudest epochs in the progress of the human understanding, and, by the praise lavished upon them by the gratitude of unscrupulous writers, to counteract the deeds of usurpation—sometimes even the vices and crimes with which they stood charged in the records of history.

Certainly it would be a manifest injustice to deny Cosmo de Medici the merit of suing for the friendship of the

* Leonardo Bruni Aretino, born, A.D. 1369; apostolical secretary under Innocent VII., 1405; Florentine secretary, 1417; died, 1444. Latin works: *History of Florence*, &c. Venice, 1570; Italian: *Vite di Dante e Petrarca*. Padua, 1650.—Guarino da Verona, born 1370; died, 1460. Translations of Plutarch, Strabo, &c. John Aurispa, from Sicily, born 1369; died at Ferrara, 1460.—Ambrogio Traversaro, born, 1386; a monk of Camalduli, 1400; a general of the order, 1431; died, 1439. Principal work, "*Hodæporicon*;" translations from the Greek.—Poggio Bracciolini, born at Terra Nova, territory of Arezzo, 1380; apostolical secretary under Boniface IX., Innocent VII., John XXIII., Martin V., Eugene IV., Nicholas V.; papal legate at the Council of Constance, 1415; Florentine secretary, 1453; died, October 30, 1459. Works: *A History of Florence*. "*De varietate fortunæ*," "*De miseria humanæ conditionis*," "*An seni sit uxor ducenda*," "*Facetiarum liber*," &c. Complete edition of his works. Bale, 1538.—Francesco Filelfo, born at Tolentino, 1398; married at Constantinople, 1424; died at Florence, 1481. Translations of Aristotle, Plutarch, Hippocrates, &c. Original works: "*Orationes*," "*Epistolæ*," &c.—Antonio Beccatelli or Panormita, born, 1394; died at Naples, 1471. Works: *Histories, orations, letters*. Venice, 1559. *Hermaphrodytus*. Paris, 1791.

learned, of freely bestowing his immense riches to forward their views, of liberally entertaining many of them at his hospitable villas, of making his palace the centre of literary intercourse. Only be it remembered, that the Florentine merchant by such largesses only acted in compliance with the universal spirit of his age, and that letters were among the most efficient instruments by which he raised himself to power and popularity.

Ever since the days of Petrarch, who might be justly called the patron of princes, it was evident that no guard could better shield the person of a prince, could better grace his retinue, than a crowd of poets and scholars exalting their patron's taste and munificence. Literature in Italy owed its rise neither to the generosity of individuals, nor to the splendour and luxury of a court. It was the want of an active and enterprising age, which, being provided with the first necessities and commodities of life, was naturally led to the cultivation of those arts that constitute its charm and ornament.

Let us rather say that literature patronised princes. It was the lustre that the friendship of Petrarch conferred on their reign that reconciled the republicans of Lombardy to the yoke of the Visconti, Carrara, and Correggio. There was scarcely an Italian prince that had not recourse to that never-failing instrument of usurpation; and Cosmo in this found rivals among the noblest monarchs, no less than the vilest tyrants of his age.

Following close upon an epoch of unbounded political activity—inheriting, as it were, and profiting by, the splendid results of that republican spirit which they conspired to smother—the Italian despots of the fifteenth century did not fail to appropriate to themselves as much of the lustre of the previous age as might be found consistent with their own policy, and felt the expediency, in fact the necessity, of directing to the harmless pursuits of learning those energies which they were otherwise unable to overmaster.

It was with a view to their own preservation—by a desire of grounding their throne on popular feelings, no less than by a natural predilection for literature—that Visconti, Este, and Medici were induced to stand godfathers to schools and academies. It is by no means certain that they would not rather have waged war against the spirit of the times, had they dared; but as this spirit existed, and could not be so summarily disposed of, the prince might as well gain credit by the fostering cares bestowed upon it, and, by laying it under obligation, bring it thus under his own control. An Italian prince, in short, durst not in those ages be a barbarian. A murderer, perhaps, stained with the most flagitious crimes, he might be; but he must seek his absolution in works of munificence; he must atone for his outrages against public morality, by his devotion to the cause of learning, and homage to the public taste.

Poggio Bracciolini was apostolic secretary to eight successive popes; he was in his later years secretary and historiographer to the Florentine republic; he and his fourteen illegitimate children were, by popular suffrage, exempted from the payment of taxes. Filelfo was received in triumph at Florence on his return from Constantinople, whence he brought a large collection of Greek manuscripts; and such was the veneration with which he was looked on, that, as he himself informs us, the ladies he met in the street respectfully gave way for him as he passed. Leonardo Aretino was visited by foreigners of distinction, many of whom even undertook long journeys to see him. A Spanish grandee knelt down in his presence, and was with the greatest difficulty persuaded to quit a posture rather obsequious than comfortable. Emmanuel Chrysoloras, Guarino da Verona, and Beccatelli were hardly allowed any rest, so frequent and so urgent were the solicitations they received from all quarters. Gio. Galeazzo Visconti had well-nigh recourse to violence to induce Chrysoloras to

teach at his new university of Pavia. Nicholas of Este intrusted Guarino with the education of his sons and successors, Lionello and Borso; and the young princes lived with their master on terms of the most cordial intimacy. Filippo Maria Visconti, otherwise a mean and avaricious tyrant, was, however, liberal of the largest presents to secure the services of Beccatelli. The Emperor Sigismund crowned this distinguished scholar with his own hands at Parma. Alphonso, the Magnanimous, bestowed upon him the titles of nobility, and raised him to the highest offices of the state.

Men of letters amply shared the enthusiasm that the results of their labours so universally excited. In all their journeys, in all their diplomatic missions, they never lost sight of the interests of literature.

Filelfo married the daughter of his master, John, brother of Emmanuel Chrysoloras, and received books for her dowry. Poggio Bracciolini absented himself from the Council of Constance to search the darkest cellars of the convent of St. Gall, where, half buried in the dust, he found treasures of Latin classicism. Aurispa wasted all his fortune, and ran himself into debt, to purchase manuscripts in Greece. Guarino, who laboured at it with equal fervour, was shipwrecked with all his collection on his return from Constantinople; and so great was his mortification at his irreparable loss, that his hair turned white in one night. Filelfo incessantly complained of the dishonesty of his friends, who refused to return to him the manuscripts he had lent for their use:—"This system of stealing each other's books was," as Tiraboschi observed, "sanctioned, as it were, by a superstitious feeling, akin to that which induced the religious enthusiasts of dark ages to rob the sanctuary of its relics."

No less devotion, diligence, and perseverance were required to rescue the monuments of ancient genius from the ravages of time, and from the long oblivion of barbarous

ages. It seemed as if nature had lengthened the natural period of human life in that southern climate to fit those scholars for their important mission. Nearly all of them reached a mature and vigorous old age. By their combined efforts almost all that is known of the ancient classics was either found or restored to its present state.

The books being found, it became an object of equal importance to preserve them.

Petrarch, Boccaccio, Coluccio Salutato, and an Augustine monk, by name Ludovico Marsilio, had already made the first attempts to establish a library. But their collections were either dispersed by wars, or destroyed by fire, or sold by their heirs soon after their death.

The first public library in Italy was the result of a liberal bequest of Niccolò Niccoli, a wealthy and accomplished Florentine, whose life had been spent in purchasing and copying manuscripts, and who left at his death, in 1436, more than eight hundred volumes, chiefly Greek and Latin classics—an unparalleled treasure in that age.

These were, by his direction, consecrated to public use, and were by his executors placed in the Dominican monastery of St. Mark.

Cosmo de Medici, one of the sixteen curators appointed by Niccoli to the accomplishment of his last dispositions, had, himself, during all his lifetime purchased manuscripts from every part of the world, and laid the foundation of what was, under his successors, called "*Bibliotheca Mediceo-Laurentiana*."

Among the friends and guests of this accomplished man there was a learned priest, by name Tommaso da Sarzana, whose cooperation had been of the greatest avail to him, whilst busy with the arrangement of his own libraries, and whose zeal for the cause of learning was hardly inferior to that of his patron.

This inclination had soon a favourable opportunity of displaying itself on a larger field, when he was unexpectedly

raised to the papal chair, on which occasion he assumed the name of Nicholas V*.

It has already been said of him that he governed the state with an iron sceptre, and quelled popular insurrections and baronial feuds by the effusion of blood. But, as a friend and patron of literary men, he eclipsed the glory to which some of his predecessors were justly entitled, and was second to none of the succeeding pontiffs.

It was during his reign, in 1453, that Europe was startled by the melancholy announcement of the fall of Constantinople. Nicholas has been, not without good reason, charged with lukewarmness and apathy in a cause so intimately connected with the interests of Christianity. "Perhaps," it has been wittily observed, "as he had foretold the forthcoming ruin of the Greek empire, he thought that his honour as a prophet was engaged in the fulfilment of his prediction."

He certainly did not fail to reap from that catastrophe the most signal advantages for Rome and Italy.

The Greeks had been, for a long period, accustomed to repair to the west for a refuge against the convulsions and dangers with which they were incessantly threatened at home. But, after the storming of their capital by the Turks of Mahomet II., they flocked to Italy in still greater numbers. The illustrious exiles brought with them in their flight those monuments of their forefathers' genius, which they well knew would secure them the most hospitable reception abroad. Many of these were by Nicholas V. welcomed and entertained at his court, some were even raised to the highest dignities in the church.

From the remnants of the Byzantine libraries which he purchased from them, and from what was constantly trans-

* Tommaso da Sarzana, born, A.D. 1398; Bishop of Bologna, 1445; a cardinal, 1446; raised to the papacy, 1447; died, 1465. Translator of Xenophon, Thucydides, Herodotus, &c.

mitted to him by his active agents abroad, the pope gathered the elements of the Vatican library, which he left at his death, enriched with more than five thousand volumes.

But an easier and more certain and durable means of preserving books, by their rapid reproduction and diffusion, was afforded by a new contrivance, providentially coinciding with the epoch in which the exertions of Italian scholarship had been crowned with the most splendid success, and when its agency was likely to prove most useful to secure its results against future dispersion*. Printing is one of the few inventions of that age to which the Italians have absolutely no claims. But, while thus yielding to a foreign nation the glory of this important discovery, Italy, as might be expected, was the first to reap its most glorious results. During the whole of the fifteenth, and part of the following century, Italy, and not unfrequently only one of the Italian towns, especially Venice, printed a greater number of books than all the rest of Europe put together. The first Greek and Oriental characters issued from Italian foundries; and the beautiful Roman and Italic types soon superseded the rude Gothic specimens of the German inventors.

The art of printing reached its last stage of perfection under Aldus in Venice†.

The active and incessant intercourse and eager cooperation which necessarily brought together the scholars of the fifteenth century in their common pursuits, gave origin to those literary associations to which they gave the name of

* Invention of printing, A.D. 1450-1455.

† Sweynheim and Pannartz, German printers, settled at Subiaco, A.D. 1465.—The first Italian press was opened by Cennini, a goldsmith at Florence, under Lorenzo de Medici, 1471.—The press of Aldus established at Venice, 1488-1506. Reopened after a long interruption, 1512.—Paulus Manutius, successor of Aldus, 1533.—Aldus the junior continued the Venetian press, 1563; placed at the direction of the Vatican press, 1588.

academies. The first of these learned institutions seems to have been established at Naples under the patronage of Alphonso, who appointed Beccatelli its first president. After the death of the Panormita, in 1471, the academy continued under the direction of Pontano, and flourished in the midst of the calamities of the invasions of Charles VIII. and his successors.

But the association to which, perhaps, the name of academy was first given, was founded by Cosmo de Medici, at Florence.

Already, since the beginning of the fifteenth century, a Greek philosopher, by name Gemistus Pletho—who had been a teacher of Chrysoloras at Constantinople, but who survived him many years, and died aged more than one hundred years—had by suggestion of his pupil established himself at Florence, where he lectured on the dogmas of the philosophy of Plato. He had the good fortune to win over to his cause the wealthy Florentine citizen, who was by him brought to the determination of opening a Platonic academy. This was first presided over by Marsilio Ficino, the son of Cosmo's physician, who was from his boyhood placed under the tuition of Greek instructors with a view to initiate him in the doctrines of Platonism*.

The philosophy of Aristotle, or rather that of his Arabian commentators, had hitherto reigned uncontrolled in the west of Europe; but the Greek philosophers had been divided into opposite factions of Aristotelians and Platonists. This division, and the interminable controversies to which it gave rise, were, by the establishment of the Platonic academy, equally brought among the Italians.

The venom and rage of those literary debates have obtained, perhaps, a greater celebrity than the real service that some of the belligerent parties performed in the re-

* Marsilio Ficino, born at Florence, A.D. 1433. His translation of Plato, 1460-1465; died, 1499.

storation of classicism. The petulance, obstinacy, and almost childish vanity by which the greatest scholars were actuated, offer a melancholy evidence of the little influence of learning in refining and ennobling man's nature. It forms a very painful contrast with the upright and lofty behaviour of Dante, and with the unshaken intimacy existing in the preceding century between Boccaccio and Petrarch;—though this last, a man of letters *par excellence*, was not always superior to mean jealousy and petty resentment.

This has been the bane of the whole genus from the earliest ages to our era. But in the fifteenth century that quarrelsome spirit was altogether of Greek importation.

The first of those controversies that may be said to have made great sensation was a scholastic dispute on the merits of their respective systems of philosophy between two learned Greeks, Cardinal Bessarion and George of Trebisonde, in which nearly all their contemporaries took an active part. That same Trapezuntius had also serious quarrels with Guarino of Verona and Poggio Bracciolini, with the last of whom he came to blows in the heat of controversy in the presence of an assembly of pontifical secretaries.

But by far the most turbulent and irritable spirit of the age was Filelfo, who could boast of having warred against all the literati of his acquaintance. To a vanity and arrogance which no friendly demonstration could propitiate, he added an uncommon degree of jealousy and suspicion. He was a dangerous ally, no less than an implacable adversary. Cosmo de Medici, for some time his friend and benefactor, became by turns the object of his virulent animosity. Leonardo Aretino, Niccoli, and others, successively gathered the gauntlet so rashly thrown by him to their patron. But the greatest as well as the bitterest of Filelfo's antagonists was Bracciolini; the contest carried on by these two worthies for several years, with equal zeal

and unction, afforded an unparalleled spectacle to the wondering multitude.

The main object of contention was soon lost sight of, arguments gave place to a mutual outpouring of personal abuse. There is hardly a vice, however base, or a crime however dark, that these two champions and their auxiliaries do not stand charged with by their competitors. In the inefficiency of their libels they resorted to more violent means of silencing each other. Filelfo's life was more than twice attempted by the agents of his adversaries, while he is himself strongly suspected of having hired a Greek assassin to murder Cosmo in his own palace.

These quarrels did not always, however, assume such a tragical mood; the lives of some of those scholars are full of amusing anecdotes. This same Filelfo, while at Constantinople, laid a wager of a hundred crowns against the beard of a Greek grammarian, by name Timotheus, on some trifling subject of philosophical discussion. Having won, he could be prevailed upon by no offer, menace, or entreaty, but insisted on having the gratification of shaving his venerable antagonist, with a pertinacity worthy of Shylock himself.

These scandalous disputes were reproduced in the succeeding age, and perpetuated from generation to generation with rare intermission. Among the names of the most famous wranglers of the following centuries are those of Politiano and Merula, of Caro and Castelvetro, Marini and Murtola, &c.

It is, however, consoling to find among the number no such men as Ariosto or Tasso, Macchiavello or Galileo. True genius is far above the mean jealousy in which such disputes originate, nor can stoop to the vile language in which they are carried on. Like the eagle, it soars in the highest regions of the air, where the shafts of malignity can indeed occasionally reach it, but utterly exhausted and blunted by distance.

Contemporaneous with the Neapolitan and Florentine academy was another classical institution, established at Rome, towards 1458, under the pontificate of Pius II., Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini.

This learned and accomplished pope, whose fame as a literary man was already established throughout Europe, who had been crowned with laurel by Frederic III., and employed by him in the most difficult and honourable missions, who had played a part of paramount importance during the contests between that emperor and Pope Eugenius IV., with more credit, perhaps, to his learning than to his character—became, at his accession, the patron of those studies to which he owed his promotion.

A number of learned scholars and antiquarians was then flourishing at Rome—a set of harmless but extravagant enthusiasts—who rebaptized themselves to assume the most sonorous names of classical latinity, banqueted after the Roman fashion, reclining on their couches, swore by the gods, as if they had never heard of the New Testament, and belonged, in fact, no more to their age than the books among which their life was spent.

Such were the founders of the Roman academy. Pomponius Lætus, Callimachus Experiens, Platina, and others, all the friends and fellow-labourers of Pius, universally revered and cherished by their contemporaries*.

But Pius died at Ancona in 1468, among the cares of his naval armament against the Turks, and his throne was filled by a man of an entirely opposite nature.

Paul II., an ignorant, bigoted monk, alarmed by the

* Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini, born at Siena, A.D. 1445; raised to the pontificate, 1458; died, 1464. First edition of his works, Bale, 1571.—Julius Pomponius Lætus, born at Naples, of the noble house of Sanseverino; persecuted at Rome, 1468; died, 1498. Works printed, Mentz, 1521.—Platina, Bartolommeo Scacchi, from Piadena, born, 1421; Librarian to the Vatican under Sixtus IV., 1475; died, 1481. His famous work, "*Vitæ summorum Pontificum*," Venice, 1489.

pagan tone of their academical mimicries, deemed it due to the dignity of his holy ministry to put an end to their proceedings. This was the first instance of a religious persecution of learning; and the example of Paul II. found but too frequent and zealous imitators. The academicians were thrown into prisons and put to the torture, under the most grievous charges of heresy and infidelity. Lætus, who had taken refuge at Venice, was dragged in chains to Rome, to share the fate of his associates; one of them, a promising youth, expired under the infliction of torture. The bloody pope himself conducted the trial, and, though no proof of guilt could be brought against them, never relented from his blind ferocity until his death came to the rescue of his prisoners.

Sixtus IV. amply proclaimed the injustice of his predecessor by releasing his victims, and restoring them to their peaceful pursuits.

But, whilst we admit that the victims of Paul II. were really innocent of the crimes imputed to them, and granting that their affectation of pagan manners and feelings was to be treated merely as puerile folly, we must also confess that other literati of that age entertained and promulgated doctrines openly hostile to the temporal supremacy, as well as the infallibility of the popes of Rome; and that others lived and wrote in open violation of all principles of religion and morals.

I had already occasion to mention how Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and many of their contemporaries, either actuated by the political bias of Ghibelinism, or indignant at the flagrant venality, corruption, and licentiousness, prevailing at the courts of Rome and Avignon, or in accordance with the wild speculations of an inquisitive age, indulged in bitter invectives against the papal power, and sometimes even dwelt with a mixture of jest and earnest on topics of dangerous controversy respecting the Christian dogma itself.

This spirit of doubt and inquiry increased with the promotion and diffusion of learning.

The frequent intercourse with able and eloquent partisans of Greek heresies, or with deeply learned Jews and Mahometans, the cold and cavilling spirit of Aristotelian philosophy, an unbounded deference to the opinions and maxims of the sages of antiquity, the loose and voluptuous lives of the highest dignitaries of the church, the gross superstition of the brutified mass of believers in the lowest orders—had engendered a secret tendency towards scepticism, which was gradually to undermine the rock on which lay the foundation of the papal throne, and prepare the world for that invaluable but highly purchased blessing—freedom of thought.

Among the most professed adversaries of the temporal power of the popes, was Lorenzo Valla, the master and friend Lorenzo de Medici, and one of the most active instruments in the restoration of classicism. His able refutation of the papal rights, such as founded on the forged gift of Constantine, did not prevent Nicholas V. and his successors—in so great a reverence learning was still held—from bestowing upon its author frequent bounties, and raising him to important ecclesiastical dignities*.

But Valla, Poggio, Filelfo, and their friends and enemies, besides their more than enthusiastic bent towards paganism and religious apathy, besides their unchristian rancour and animosity, were also liable to the more serious charge of unbounded profligacy, both shamelessly displayed in their writings, and in their private manners through life.

I have already adverted to the necessity of mistrusting calumnies brought against each other by those angry disputants in the heat of controversy: we must with equal

* Lorenzo Valla, born at Rome, A.D. 1400; died at Rome, 1457. His works: "*De rebus gestis a Ferdinando Aragonum rege*," lib. iii.; "*Hispania illustrata*;" "*Elegantiae linguæ Latinæ*," etc.

charity hope that their moral principles were sounder than the portrait which they left of themselves in their works would induce us to believe. For although it is universally agreed that a book is a reflection of the author's mind, yet there is always a petty malignity inherent in human nature, a fondness for witty display, a desire of saying always something new, and odd, and piquant, which oftentimes silences the scruples of a rigid conscience, and suffers humour to prevail over principle.

Thus, notwithstanding the fourteen illegitimate children which Poggio—an apostolical secretary—laid to the charge of the community of Florence, and those that Valla—a canon of St. John of Lateran—bequeathed to the munificence of his liberal patron, we are yet inclined to hope that the morals of those writers were not so utterly relaxed as would appear from the “*Facetiæ*” of Poggio, or the “*Hermaphroditus*” of Beccatelli.

The self-respect and austerity of early printers prevented them from degrading their types by the publication of those infamous productions. But during the ravages of the French revolution, those works were removed from the dark shelves of the Laurentian library to be published at Paris, in 1791; “the editor,” adds Ginguené, “probably feeling assured that the morals of his country were so confirmed as to have nothing to fear.”

But, notwithstanding the general ardour of that age for learned pursuits, and the encouragement of popular applause and princely munificence, the study of classical languages was still in its infancy. The translations from Greek by Traversaro, Filelfo, and others, were far from displaying a profound acquaintance with that language to which their life was consecrated; whilst the Latin writings even of Valla and Poggio, though, on the whole, more correct and accurate than those of Petrarch, still bear deep traces of that barbarism from which they struggled to emerge.

Latin was only perfectly written, Greek and Hebrew were only thoroughly understood, by the scholars of the following generation. The age of plodding erudition was succeeded by the age of true scholarship. What the friends of Cosmo de Medici only sowed, was reaped by the familiars of Lorenzo.

It was only during the latest part of the fifteenth, and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, that the efforts of Politiano at Florence, of Pontano and Sannazzaro at Naples, of Bembo and Sadoleto at Venice and Rome, brought about what was called the second age of the Latin language. It was when Aldus, himself a scholar, and first of a family of scholars, opened, in 1500, a new academy at Venice, and, with the aid of its members, commenced that edition of the classics that stands unmatched among typographical undertakings; when Aldus himself and his son Paulus Manutius were among the most elegant writers as well as the stanchest partisans of the language of Rome; when Politiano's translation of Herodian was entitled to become a classical work, and his Greek epigrams could rank among the best in the *Anthologia*; when the hexameters of Fracastoro's "*Syphilis*," and of Sannazzaro's "*De Partu Virginis*," could stand the parallel of Lucan and Statius, if not of Virgil;—it was then, I say, that the work of Petrarch could be considered as definitely accomplished, and the war waged by erudition against time crowned with lasting success*.

* Angelo Politiano, born at Monte Pulciano, A.D. 1454; introduced to the court of Lorenzo de Medici, 1468; died, 1492. Complete edition of his works, Paris, 1512.—Joviano Pontano, born at Cereto, Umbria, 1426; died, 1503. His works printed, 1538.—Azzio Sincero Sannazzaro, born at Naples, 1458; died, 1530. "*De Partu Virginis*," printed at Naples, 1526; "*Arcadia*," Naples, 1563.—Pietro Bembo, born at Venice, 1470; apostolical secretary to Leo X., 1513; a cardinal by appointment of Paul III., 1534; died, 1547. Complete edition of his Latin works, Venice, 1729. "*Asolani*," Venice, Aldus, 1505. "*Prose*," 1525. History of Venice in Latin and Italian.—Jacopo Sadoleto, born at Modena,

This noble achievement, which the Italian scholars obtained by their endeavours to reproduce in their own writings the style of ancient Rome—by what might otherwise be considered in itself as a mere waste of time—was of even a greater importance than it was given to them to foresee. For, it cannot be denied, that without this apparently retrograde spirit of imitation, without this almost idolatrous veneration that induced them to identify themselves with the dead, without, as they did, writing, talking, thinking, and breathing but Greek and Latin, they would not have bestowed upon us, their descendants, all that we know about the social order of Greece and Rome ; all that vast inheritance of ancient genius, wisdom, and policy from which our own social progress received such a vital impulse.

Meanwhile that country, in which learning had reached so high a degree of popularity and of political importance, began to exercise its influence upon the neighbouring nations.

The political discontents occasioned by the sudden vicissitudes of the Italian republics, a natural spirit of adventure and learned research, the diplomatic missions especially from Florence, Venice, and Rome, to which, as to all important offices, men of learning were exclusively appointed, drew to the courts of France, England, and Germany a vast number of conspicuous Italian scholars, who never failed to be received with the warmest friendship, and not unfrequently were prevailed upon to settle abroad.

From the age of Boniface VIII., who received at his court at the same epoch, in 1300, ambassadors from sixteen different European powers, all natives of Florence, Italians were to be found in high credit at every court.

1477 ; secretary to Leo X., 1513 ; to Clement VII., 1523 ; cardinal under Paul III., 1536 ; died, 1547. Edition of his works, Mentz, 1607. —Fracastoro, a poet and a physician, born at Verona, 1483 ; died, 1553. The "Syphilis" first printed, 1521.

On the other side, the frequency of wars and feudal dissensions, the anarchic condition of the social system in the north of Europe, the inducement of a bright sky and delightful climate, and, above all, the fame of superior refinement, the comforts and luxuries of the Italian cities, operated as irresistible arguments to bring English, French, and German students into Italy, who continued to repair to the classical academies of Florence and Rome, as young artists from the same countries are now to be seen crowding the Pitti and Vatican galleries.

The most accomplished monarchs abroad vied with the pontiffs and princes of Italy in their liberal encouragement of literature.

Politiano numbered several crowned heads among his assiduous correspondents, especially the good and great Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, the whole of whose long reign was spent in strenuous and yet ineffectual endeavours to dissipate the deep ignorance in which his country was yet involved.

Thus it was that Grocyn and Lineacre in England, Erasmus and Buddæus in Germany, were enabled to lay the basis of those classical schools in the North, which were soon to leave the Italian masters far behind in every branch of erudition.

The taste of the Italians for classical lore, and their proficiency in the study of the dead languages, has, ever since the age of Lorenzo de Medici, or of Leo X., been on its decline.

The disinclination of that southern people for the serious and sedulous application which such studies necessarily require, had already caused Latin to fall into neglect and desuetude, in proportion as it became an all-absorbing object of attention in England and Germany, when, during the presumptuous era of the last French invasion, that language was officially proscribed from the schools.

Italy has, since that time, partly recovered from that

extreme of absurdity; Latin is still one of the vital branches of education in all Catholic seminaries. Still the day is long since past when a Roman *abate* could recite extemporary Latin verses before a delighted audience, and it is now rare, in the land of Bembo and Pontano, to find a scholar capable of writing tolerable Latin. The performance of one of Plautus's or Terence's plays, such as given by the Eton or Westminster boys, would be a rare spectacle in an Italian university.

The interest that the people, even of the lowest orders, seemed to take in the cause of science and literature during the fifteenth century, is only to be accounted for by the total want of easier sources of enjoyment.

The practice of giving public exhibitions of learning and eloquence, of delivering Latin or Greek dissertations on the most abstruse and recondite subjects, in which Dante is remembered to have distinguished himself, acquired every day a more universal popularity. A set of showy scholars roamed from town to town, walking atlases, who carried the contents of a whole library in their heads, indefatigable encyclopædists who mastered every branch of knowledge, and could discourse with plausibility on all topics, and who substituted their learned disputations for the chivalrous tournaments of olden times.

Of all these monsters of learning, from the age of Dante down to the "Admirable Crichton," by far the most famous and truly wonderful was the phoenix of geniuses—Pico della Mirandola.

This extraordinary being, who in the prime of life had courage to renounce the pleasures and vanities of a world in which his high rank, personal advantages, and uncommon endowments, entitled him to take a large share, who burnt his juvenile love poems, and shunned all feminine intercourse, to give himself up to the study of a mystical divinity; who, led astray by artful impostors, plunged into the chimera of the Jewish cabbala, and to an immense store

of genuine learning added also not a few of the extravagancies of the age, published at Rome, in 1486, that unheard-of challenge to all the learned of Europe, by which he offered to discourse on nine hundred propositions on all logical, ethical, mathematical, metaphysical, theological, magical, and cabbalistical subjects.

That exhibition, however, never took place. He was obliged to quit Rome, where his enemies denounced him as a teacher of heresy, and had to fight for it against the church of Rome during the rest of his life*.

This ardour for literary display, which afforded so ample a scope for the gratification of vanity, could not fail to prove attractive to the fair sex. The grave scholars of the fifteenth century were not only encouraged by the smile and applause, but even stimulated by the rivalry, of handsome contemporaries, who descended with them into the literary arena and beat them at their own weapons.

Alexandra Scala and Cassandra Fedele were among the learned correspondents of Politiano, who was violently enamoured with one of them, and left in his writings ample testimonials of his admiration for the other. Domitilla Trivulzia delivered Latin orations before thronged assemblies; and Isotta of Verona appeared among the disputants in public controversies, one of her favourite subjects being the degree of culpability of either sex in that fatal slip of our first parents, by which Eden was lost to their posterity—when Isotta stood forward for the cause of her sex, and when, owing either to her eloquence or to gallantry on the part of her adversaries, mother Eve invariably came off with the victory.

Meanwhile the hour of the great national calamity had struck, and learning was to be involved in its ruin.

* Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, born, A.D. 1436; a friend of Lorenzo de Medici, Ficino and Politiano; died, 1494. Works: "Heptaplus," "De ente et uno," "Conclusiones," etc.

Lorenzo de Medici, Politiano, and several others of their friends, all young—all nearly at one stroke—were swept off within the space of two years, 1492—1494. Pico della Mirandola died at Florence, on the very day of the triumphal entry of Charles VIII. into that city. The bands of French soldiery, and the Florentine populace, justly incensed against the name of Medici, carried their indiscriminate devastation among the treasures of literature and art, that the industry of that family had collected in their palace. Next came the intolerant zeal of Savonarola, who, under pretence of destroying the profane obscenities of the semi-pagan court of Lorenzo, made a bon-fire of all that had escaped the Vandalic ravages of the French.

Every town of Italy, Venice excepted, endured similar executions; and, even at Venice, the din and hurry of war scared the student from his peace-loving pursuits. The Academy of Aldus was dispersed, and his printing establishment broken up.

The profligacy of Alexander VI., and the warlike spirit of Julius II., afforded but a scanty encouragement to the members of the Roman Academy; and though Pontano and his associates were able to weather that stormy season in Naples, still, even there, though lingering with more tenacious vitality, learning had received its death-wound.

All that the diligence of two generations had laid together, for the benefit of the remotest posterity, was once more scattered and trodden during those forty years of confusion and violence.

Some efforts to arrest and counteract the work of destruction were made by Giovanni de Medici, who carried on the papal throne that splendour and taste by which his progenitors had shone in happier times.

The name of Leo X. has been exalted or vituperated with equal exaggeration by the animosity of opposite parties. That name, however, must, whether with good reason

or not, stand where it was placed by the consent of after ages—at the head of the third and last period of the progress of classical literature.

The memory of Leo, as an Italian prince, is disgraced by a system of irresolute, improvident, unprincipled policy; as a Roman pontiff, by a lavish, venal, simoniacal abuse of his sacred ministry; as a private man, by a free indulgence in a wanton and sometimes even vulgar epicurism. But, as a contrast to these defects, it must be said of him that he called round his throne Bembo and Sadoletto; and if it is true that Ariosto never received from him any thing beyond fair promises and a kiss, and that the pontiff in his fit of ill-humour betrayed an invincible dislike for the proud and unbending Michael Angelo, it would be unjust to deny that he was the constant friend and patron of Raphael; it may be said, also, that he had perhaps more of affection than respect for his accomplished guests and courtiers, or of regard for their feelings—if we are to believe that his table was usually crowded with base and impudent buffoons, and that he did not hesitate to profane Petrarch's laurel and the Capitol by a mock coronation of his laughing-stocks, Querno and Baraballo.

Yet the cares he bestowed on the restoration of the Laurentian library, his liberality to the Roman gymnasium and to the reinstated academy, and the open hospitality with which every man of talent was housed at the Vatican, cannot fail to call forth the praise of posterity.

Unfortunately the disasters of Italy were not yet at an end. All that had been collected and treasured up under Leo's auspices was again deplorably devastated by the barbarians of the Constable of Bourbon.

Thus the work of destruction was continued down to what was called the pacification of Italy, in 1530, when studies were languidly and despondingly resumed under the scourges of the Spanish tyranny at Milan and Naples, and the Dominican Inquisition at Rome.

The universal feeling of national humiliation and bondage, the sudden cessation of civil life, the systematic establishment of a jealous, suspicious, cowardly tyranny, the degraded character of the princes of the reigning houses of Medici, Farnese, and Este, the blasting influence of bigoted pontiffs, by rapid degrees discouraged the Italians from the noble career in which their ancestors had taken the precedence of other nations, and turned their minds to idler but safer pursuits.

The mission of Italy was in the meantime accomplished. The nations who were led, either by ambition or the thirst of plunder, to the desolation of that fated land, carried beyond the Alps the fruits of the labour of Italian scholars as the best spoil of victory.

What had hitherto been the gift and privilege of one people became the common property and heritage of the whole European family.

But more, perhaps, than to any of the evils of division and vassalage, the decline of literature in Italy, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, is to be attributed to the effects of what was for other nations the happiest revolution—the consequences of the Reformation.

This great and fundamental division of the church, which had been silently prepared by so many different causes during previous ages, but which was determined by the extravagant expenditures of Leo X., and his unscrupulous traffic of indulgences, was, as I have had frequent occasion to say, neither entirely new, nor unfavourably heard of in Italy.

Arnold of Brescia, Dante, Lorenzo Valla, Savonarola, and many other daring spirits, had more than once attempted to open the eyes of the multitude, and to free the Italian mind from the fetters of Catholic despotism. Religious indifference and anarchy had reached its height towards the end of the fifteenth century.

The doctrines of Luther and Calvin, encouraging a spirit

of free inquiry, could not fail to be warmly received in a country naturally inclined towards them, by the recent memory of its liberal institutions, by its superior refinement and culture. The most sanguine members of the Roman and Neapolitan academies abandoned their unprofitable disputes concerning Aristotle and Plato, and exercised their powers in the discussion of the important topics recently started by the German innovators.

The utter relaxation of ecclesiastical discipline, the tolerance, not to say absolute indifference, of the two worldly-minded popes of the house of Medici, seemed to give a tacit encouragement to those dangerous doctrines. Some of the most accomplished princes of the age, and not a few even of the highest dignitaries of the church, are believed to have been more or less seduced by the speciousness of Protestant arguments. The Reformation found favour with what Italy had most conspicuous among the higher classes; it numbered among its votaries ladies distinguished by their rank, beauty, and genius. For a good number of years the reformed doctrines were promulgated, reformed churches were opened throughout the country, not only without serious opposition, but even with the open approbation of some of the Italian rulers. But when, at last, the church and its supporters were seriously determined to put an end to the heresy of Luther, by fair means or foul, when the opposite factions were brought into violent collision, and it became a necessity for every state as well as for individuals to come to an open profession of faith, the Italians were no longer masters of themselves. The whole country lay prostrate at the feet of the armies of Spain, of that power which gave so ample proofs of relentless, sanguinary bigotry. Whatever opinions might have prevailed in Italy friendly to the Protestant faith, they would inevitably have been drowned in blood.

The Council of Trent pronounced its ultimatum, and Italy received it as a law*.

Bold and persevering men occasionally arose, openly asserting their right to abide by what they deemed to be truth. But the Jesuits and Dominicans†, both Spanish institutions, backed by victorious Spanish legions, carried every thing before them by the arguments of fire and sword. The Italians resisted religious persecution with considerable energy, especially at Milan and Naples; the Holy Office never was suffered to assume in Italy the darkest colours of the Spanish Inquisition.

It had power enough, nevertheless, to overcome all opposition.

But, had it been otherwise, had the Italians not been fettered to their religious yoke by political circumstances, it is more than doubtful whether the whole nation would ever have embraced Protestantism in its widest sense. To their sceptic irreverence for the awful dogmas of revelation, by which some of them so far outran Luther and Calvin, and sowed the seeds of Socinianism abroad, the Italians added a timid reluctance to embrace any measure that might bring about a definitive scissure in the church‡. The consequences of the ancient Greek heresies, and the more recent disorders of the great Western Schism, were still before them, with all their horrors of brotherly rancour and civil bloodshed. They had an instinctive foreboding of the endless divisibility of sects. They knew

* First sitting of the Council of Trent, A.D. 1545; removed to Bologna, 1547; recalled to Trent, 1551; dispersed by wars, 1552; reopened, 1561; closed, 1563.

† Bull of Paul III. for the Institution of Jesuits, A.D. 1540.

‡ Lælius Socinus, the founder of modern Unitarianism, born at Sienna, A.D. 1525; joins the reformers in Switzerland; dies at Zurich, 1562. Faustus Socinus, his nephew, born at Sienna, 1539; emigrates to Germany, 1574; establishes Unitarianism in Poland; dies, 1604.

how easily men are apt to pass from arguments to blows, and they had recently suffered too much from war to be willing to undergo its disasters for the sake of religious opinion.

For a long time events seemed to justify their anxious apprehensions. Every year tidings of nefarious deeds were brought to Italy, from the land where the great cause of religious reformation was debated. Lutherans, Calvinists, Huguenots, Puritans, a hundred sects appeared, arising from blood, drowning each other in blood, like the warriors springing from the dragon's teeth in ancient mythology. The short-sighted Italians congratulated themselves on their exemption from the evils of Flanders and Germany. They did not foresee that rebellion was in those countries to lead to a close of evil—submission was for them evil without a close!

Religious intolerance led the way to political persecution. The Italian tyrants knew how to enlist the inquisitors in their cause. Church and state for the first time entered into a close confederacy against learning and truth; an unnatural alliance, against which all the efforts of modern social progress are yet unable to prevail.

The advancement of the fine arts was analogous, as it was contemporaneous, with the promotion of the interests of learning. From the earliest epoch of the emancipation of the Lombard and Tuscan cities, it had been the pride of those sober and frugal republicans to consecrate the best part of their increasing wealth to the erection of lofty buildings, destined for their place of worship, or for the residence of their municipal magistrates. A rude and severe, but grand and lofty, Gothic style presided over those edifices, happily blended, especially in the sea-ports—at Venice, Genoa, and Pisa—with ornament in the Oriental taste, imported by their navigators from the models of Greek and Saracenic structures.

Such was the architecture of the Middle Ages in Italy,

sufficient in itself, and without the aid of extraneous elements, to overawe the judgment of a more refined, but neither more fecund nor more ingenious posterity. The town-halls and cathedrals still standing in almost every town of Northern Italy, bearing dates of the eleventh and twelfth centuries—the baptisteries of Pisa, Florence, and Parma—and the unparalleled Campo Santo—almost give us reason to regret that that primeval national taste was not followed up to its utmost degree of improvement.

Sculpture in that age, scarcely a separate art, proceeded hand in hand with architecture; and the earliest specimens of the three Pisan artists, especially the staid and solemn, but majestically sublime figures of the pulpit in the baptistery at Pisa, are the productions of a new and primitive, but, it would be blasphemy to say, infant art*.

Still greater wonders were soon to be performed in Florence. There the austere genius of Arnolfo di Lapo had given the ancient towns and palaces a rigid—almost a sombre aspect. The greatest of his conceptions—the wide and gloomy aisles of what was to be “the finest cathedral in the world,” lay still after two centuries unroofed and unfinished; but by their side rose the gay, light, and harmonious belfry of Giotto; and, opposite, the skill of Ghiberti had decorated the old San Giovanni with his high-finished “gates of Paradise.”

Painting could hardly boast of equally rapid progress. The works of the earliest Pisan and Siennese masters, no less than those of Cimabue and Giotto, though certainly recommendable by that same naïve and truly angelic grace that characterised the earliest specimens of sculpture, still would induce us to believe that painting was in a much less advanced state than the sister arts, per-

* Niccolo and Giovanni Pisano flourished early in the thirteenth century.—Andrea Pisano flourished towards A.D. 1300.—Arnolfo di Lapo built the Palazzo della Signoria, at Florence, 1298.—Laying of the first stone of the Cathedral of Florence, 1289.

haps because it is susceptible of a higher degree of perfection*.

But art soared a much more significant flight in Florence when it felt the impulse of the sovereign mind of Filippo Brunelleschi†. This rare man, who alone was equal to the task of carrying into execution the plan of the gigantic Arnolfo, and by raising the dome of the Florentine cathedral outdid, by a wide interval, the greatest efforts of antiquity, who crowned his native town with so many other splendid edifices, is perhaps better than any of his successors, not excepting even Michael Angelo himself, entitled to the appellation of creator of Italian art. What Brunelleschi accomplished in architecture, his contemporaries Masaccio, Ghiberti, and Donatello, did for painting and sculpture‡.

Hitherto, art was in Italy, as well as literature, national, republican, romantic, original. It had arisen from the wants and in accordance with the spirit of the age. It bore the marks of a half-Roman, half-German, half-Oriental civilisation. It belonged to the people, and sought for no better encouragement than the suffrage of popular approbation.

The people was a better patron of genius than the most liberal princes.

The paintings of Cimabue were removed to their destination to the sound of triumphal music, followed by the whole population drawn up in a solemn procession. Arnolfo was ordered by the magistrates to spare no expense, but build them a church that should have no equal

* Cimabue, born, A.D. 1240; died, 1300.—Giotto, born, 1276; died, 1336.

† Brunelleschi, born at Florence, A.D. 1377; accomplished his great work of the Cathedral of Florence, 1426; died, 1446.

‡ Masaccio, born, A.D. 1402; died, 1443.—Ghiberti, born, 1378; died about 1455.—Donatello, born, 1383; died, 1466.

in the world; whilst Cosmo, the most generous lover of art, suffered his economy, or, perhaps, his political discretion, to interfere with his patronal munificence, and caused Brunelleschi to burn the rejected design of his palace, out of vexation and disappointment.

Meanwhile the new turn that literature had taken in Italy, in consequence of the newly awakened ardour for the works of antiquity, extended its influence over the productions of art.

Already, during the fourteenth century, the example of classical scholars had directed public attention towards the monuments of antiquity. Cola da Rienzi is well known to have derived his revolutionary arguments from the interpretation of ancient inscriptions, and from the sublime records graven on the ruins of the great buildings of Rome. He and his friends, Petrarch and Coluccio Salutato, were as diligent in the collection of ancient gems and medals as in their search after classical manuscripts.

Their example could not be lost upon the scholars of the following century. Poggio Bracciolini, and, at his suggestion, Cosmo de Medici, Niccolò Niccoli, and other illustrious private men, gave origin to what became afterwards the boast of princely museums. The gallery of statues and other antiquities belonging to Lorenzo de Medici, and the academy annexed to it, are said to have been the great school where, with many others, young Michael Angelo's genius was formed*.

* Michael Angelo Buonarrotti, born, March 6, A.D. 1474; a pupil of Ghirlandaio, 1488; quitted Florence, 1494; returned, 1498; his cartoons of the war of Pisa, 1500; invited to Rome by Julius II., 1505; monument of Julius and statue of Moses, 1506; exhibition of his works in the Sixtine Chapel, November 1, 1514; sculptures in the vestry of San Lorenzo, 1523; employed in works of fortification during the siege of Florence, 1527-1530; the Last Judgment finished, 1541; directed the works of St. Peter, 1534-1563; died, February 17, 1564.—Leonardo

Certainly he is to be considered as the first author of that great revolution that substituted modern for mediæval, classical for romantic art. Before him Brunelleschi had indeed visited the remains of Roman monuments, and profited by the lessons of antiquity. But, under Michael Angelo, the past prevailed altogether over the present. He founded modern Italy immediately on the ruins of ancient Rome, effacing the memory of the middle ages. With a mind as vast and free as that of Dante, of whom he was the warmest admirer, he, however, obeyed the influence of Petrarch. Had he been differently educated, St. Peter's, at Rome, would have had all the originality of the Divine Comedy. In consistency with his proud and independent genius, his work was indeed rather that of emulation than imitation. But his followers did not or could not understand him. Their pride aimed no higher than to copy with servility those models which their master had left far behind.

Michael Angelo seemed to be aware that his native town was no favourable stage where he could appear to advantage: as a painter in his younger days, when he entered the lists as the competitor of Leonardo da Vinci, or a sculptor, later in life, when he worked at the vestry of San Lorenzo, we find Michael Angelo at Florence. But as an architect Arnolfo and Brunelleschi allowed him no hope of doing

da Vinci, born, 1443; invited to the Court of Milan by Ludovico il Moro, 1483; painting of the Last Supper, 1498; repaired to Florence, 1499; cartoons of the wars of Pisa, 1503; invited to Rome by Leo, 1513; invited to France by Francis I., 1515; died in the king's arms, at Fontainebleau, 1520.—Raphael Sanzio, born at Urbino, March 28, 1483; a pupil of Perugino, 1496; brought into contact with Michael Angelo and Leonardo, at Florence, 1502; invited to Rome by Julius II., 1508; his paintings in the Vatican finished, 1517; the Transfiguration, 1520; died, April 7, 1520.—Bramante, born at Urbino, 1444; employed at Rome by Alexander VI., 1500; the Loggie of the Vatican, 1503-1513; laying of the first stone of St. Peter's, 1508; death of Bramante, 1514.

better. He repaired to Rome, and raised to the divinity "a firmament of marble."

There reigned then at Rome a man endowed with an ardent, irritable temper, with a stern and powerful will, capable of high undertakings, though governed by sudden and unequal impulses—the greatest if not the holiest of popes, Julius II.

Michael Angelo found him all exulting in his recent discovery of the group of Laocoon, and anxiously watching over the works of the Vatican which, since the time of Nicholas V., had been successively enlarged on a magnificent scale, and to which Julius's favourite architect, Bramante, was now adding his stupendous *Loggie*, and giving the last finish.

The daring views of Michael Angelo's genius inflamed the imagination of the generous pope, who was soon determined on the demolition of the old metropolitan church of Christendom, and, in open defiance of the superstitious veneration attached to that august pile, levelled it with the ground, and laid the first stone with the erection of the "eighth wonder of the world."

The design of the new Basilica and its execution was intrusted to Bramante, who was fully equal to his task; but the building was not accomplished until long after the death of Julius and his architect, and its principal achievement was the work of him who had inspired its first thought.

The vastness of Julius's enterprising genius, and the providential combination of three such minds as Bramante, Michael Angelo, and Raphael, distinguished the pontificate of Julius, and of his successor, Leo X., as the epoch of the triumph of modern art. Its most admired monuments were either produced or conceived during that short interval of twenty years, and united within the narrow space of one favourite spot—a church and a palace.

That palace and that church were equally meant as trophies of Catholicism in its height of prosperity; but they proved to be the immediate source of its dissolution, and marked the commencement of a decline which may eventually end in its utter downfall.

Art in Italy is necessarily identified with the name of him who equally excelled in all its branches. An Italian cannot go so far—cannot by the present dejection of his country feel so downcast and humbled, that he may not raise his head among strangers and say, “I was born in the land of Michael Angelo!”

As a painter, Leonardo had done wonders at Milan ere Michael Angelo was known in Florence, nor would he have easily yielded to his competitor, had he not been utterly absorbed in his important scientific pursuits. As an architect, Brunelleschi can stand a parallel with Buonarrotti in his proudest moments. In sculpture also much had been done by those whom he condescended to acknowledge as his masters. But his age seemed imbued with the great artist's spirit. The noblest minds seemed to catch fire by his contact. Before him art was not yet determined on any definite course—after him it seemed as if nothing remained, but either to complete what he had left unachieved, or to follow at a great distance in his footsteps.

In order to bow before Michael Angelo's genius, it is not necessary to see St. Peter, the Moses, or the Last Judgment. His fame rests upon something more solid than even those unmatched but not imperishable monuments. The influence that the uprightness, energy, and loftiness of his character exercised on his and the following ages—that noble pride by which he was enabled to withstand the impatience and violence of Julius, the meanness and presumption of Leo—are sufficient to send his name down to the latest posterity: until, at least, men

be utterly dead to the spectacle of mental excellence and moral greatness.

. "We bow
To that supreme intelligence
By whom our mortal kind
Was made to bear so deep the stamp
Of his creative mind." *

* Manzoni.

CHAPTER II.

ARIOSTO.

Reaction in favour of Italian Literature—Lorenzo de Medici—Politiano—Pulci—The House of Este—Chivalrous Poetry—The “Morgante”—Boiardo—The “Orlando Innamorato”—Ariosto—His Life and Character—The “Orlando Furioso”—Revival of Chivalrous Spirit.

THE work of erudition had no sooner been accomplished by the scholars of the fifteenth century, than the Italians were gradually brought back to the cultivation of their national language and the literature of the age of Dante. This revolution, which was to restore the living language on its throne, and give it its proper ascendancy over the dead, is due to the influence of princes, and arose in accordance with princely views. From the earliest moment of his accession, to the undefined but undisputed supremacy that his family had held in Florence during two generations, Lorenzo de Medici was made aware of the necessity of following the line of policy traced out by the wisdom of his grandfather, Cosmo, that of courting the people. The serious disturbances by which the short reign of his father, Piero, had been frequently agitated, the sudden attack of Prato on the very outset of his own and of his brother's political career, the fatal conspiracy of the Pazzi, to which this last had fallen a victim, and from which he had himself so narrowly escaped, only to find himself engaged in an unequal war against all the

powers of Italy, had easily convinced him that his sovereignty was not altogether based on granite.

Hence to a cautious and almost hypocritical display of popular manners and principles, to a jealous care with which he watched over the protection of the external forms of a democratic government, and affected, and recommended to his sons to assume, the rank and style of private citizens, Lorenzo knew how to add a taste and munificence which did not slightly contribute to the success of those ambitious schemes which the heirs of Cosmo were so perseveringly pursuing.

Hence all those shows and festivals, which were generally announced in the name of the republic, but of which the coffers of his bankers invariably defrayed the expenses; the tournaments, now for the first time after a long interval revived in republican Italy; the opening of a theatre, an unexampled event since the fall of Rome; and all those numberless dances, masquerades and processions, of which a great number are still celebrated in Florence—engendered among the people, or encouraged that dissipation and indolence, which could best fit them for the yoke insensibly laid on their neck.

The visit of the vain and giddy despot, Galeazzo Sforza, to Florence in 1471; the prodigal waste of his numerous retinue; their drunken riots, in which the populace was suffered to join them; the contagious example of courtly luxury and licentiousness—humbled whilst it dazzled the frugal Florentines. It was, therefore, with a feeling of complacency and gratitude that they saw even the attention of the brutal Milanese lord attracted by the objects of art and antiquity, in which the Medici prided themselves, and which was all that Florence could oppose to the glittering pageantry of their guest.

So it was that the fiercest population in Italy was schooled to servitude. Those public games and spectacles, the literary and artistical exhibitions with which they were

daily entertained, were for the Florentines the mess of pottage, for the sake of which they gave up their intellectual birthright.

Intent as he was to study the inclination of a naturally acute and refined people, Lorenzo was soon aware that, notwithstanding the interest that the lowest classes apparently took in the progress of learning, and the attention they paid to endless dissertations in a dead language, and on dead subjects, much more could be expected by appealing more directly to their sympathies, and bringing those entertainments to the level of their understandings.

The poetry of a happier age, the long-forgotten poetry of Dante and Petrarch, remained still, though in a state of utter degradation, among the people; it was sung or recited by strolling minstrels with universal delight to the multitude. That poetry the Medici resolved to revive. Lorenzo himself, and after his example his young friends Politiano and Pulci, made themselves the people's minstrels; and those first specimens of epic and chivalrous poems, whether designedly or not, became one of the efficient instruments by which the Florentines were piped and danced into servitude.

It would be great injustice to deny Lorenzo de Medici the credit of a very superior taste and manifold accomplishments, as well as uncommon amiableness and liberality of character, or to dispute the influence he exercised on the general progress of letters and arts. Still his claims on our admiration and gratitude have been perhaps exaggerated, by the attachment of his contemporaries, and dwelt upon with unaccountable partiality even in later ages.

Had not Italy been otherwise prepared for a reaction in favour of her national language, it is doubtful whether his influence had been sufficient to bring it about. The popular songs of Lorenzo were most probably not meant to

survive the circumstance that gave them birth. Politiano silenced his Italian muse, even before his mind had reached its maturity, and the verses of Pulci were written in too great a haste to be seriously intended as literary performances.

The love poems of Lorenzo do not soar above the common level of mediocrity; his carnival songs and rural stanzas, though more spontaneous and original, make us painfully aware how deplorably the Italian language had degenerated from the ease, elegance and purity of Petrarch.

Politiano's verses, written, as they were, at an earlier date, were more exquisitely finished as to style. That is, however, all that can be said in their favour. Politiano, who exercised the highest authority among the scholars of his age, who left at his death so brilliant a reputation, scarcely tarnished by the vague accusations that have been raised against his memory as to the soundness of his morals—never wrote Italian poetry after the age of sixteen. His famous "Stanze," no less than his formless embryo of a drama, the "Orfeo," which he wrote in two days, though evidently the works of a poet, still bear evident marks of premature age; and the very exuberance and luxuriance of his fancy render the perusal of these two fragments, short as they are, considerably fatiguing.

Pulci, the youngest of three brothers, all poets*, accomplished a greater task, and, as it proved, more important for its consequences by his chivalro-heroi-comic poem, "Il Morgante." This work, which had been rather freely exalted by the Florentines in the days of their provincial prejudices of the Della Crusca Academy, and which, even in later times, found favour with men of eminent genius, is, however, neither recommendable for its plan, episodes,

* Luigi Pulci, born, A.D. 1432; died, 1487. "Il Morgante Maggiore." Venice, 1488.

or characters, nor yet, whatever may be said of its pure Tuscan, for its style. It is a vile, vulgar performance, which had its origin among the orgies of a dissolute court, disgusting for its strange mixture of mock bigotry and scoffing irreligion, an unrelieved exhibition of ignoble, bacchanalian sensualism.

Still, by those first attempts of the court of Medici, Italian poetry was recalled from the public square to the palace of princes, and though, at first, merely regarded as an object of idle pastime, it had power to turn the attention of Italian scholars to the works of the master minds of the preceding ages, and eventually to awaken Italian genius from its centennial slumbers.

Thus the commentary on the Divine Comedy by Christopher Landino, one of the tutors of Lorenzo*, gives us reason to believe that the name of Dante was not utterly forgotten in that age; and the lives of that poet and of Petrarch, which had been written in Italian by Leonardo Aretino, under Cosmo de Medici, and were brought into life soon after the age of Lorenzo, may be considered as a symptom of the tendency of that epoch towards the national literature.

Yet the revolution could not be considered as fully accomplished before the beginning of the sixteenth century, when those very men, who had been more successful in their specimens of Latin versification, especially Bembo and Sannazzaro, seemed finally made aware that all the works of imagination, being necessarily the result of immediate inspiration, can only be dictated in that language which most immediately occurs to the writer's mind, and that, however laborious studies may render a dead language a second nature to the assiduous scholar,

* Christoforo Landino, born at Florence, A.D. 1424; appointed instructor of Lorenzo and Julian, 1457; Florentine secretary, 1489; died, 1504.

"Disputationum Camaldulenticum," lib. iv. Florence, 1480.

yet this can only be obtained by forcing his mind into a different channel of thought, and giving his living images all the chill and rigidity of death.

The "Arcadia" of Sannazzaro and the "Asolani" of Bembo, cold and languid productions as they appear to us, had, however, a brilliant success in other ages, and mainly contributed to the revival of Italian literature. Still, so universally perverted were the notions of the age, that Bembo did not hesitate to advise Ariosto to write his poem in Latin, and was himself, with great reluctance, persuaded, towards the close of his life, to translate into Italian his history of Venice, written by him originally in that language which alone he deemed fit for grave subjects.

Nevertheless, Italian poetry began to be cultivated with renovated ardour. The classics of Greece and Rome were rendered into the vernacular language, the absurdity of performing Latin dramas on the stage became apparent, and Italian literature in every branch was started afresh into life. The example of the Medici was eagerly followed by other princes. Poets and improvisatori of the highest rank roamed from court to court in imitation of the troubadours of chivalrous times. They were sure of the warmest welcome wherever they appeared. The people shut up their shops, and strewn the streets with garlands and flowers. The halls or churches where their exhibitions took place were crowded to suffocation. The poet was received with loud acclamation, and saluted with such high titles as the Unique, the Divine.

But this popular reaction in favour of Italian was soon to receive the sanction of the hand of genius. The revolution that had commenced under the patronage of the house of Medici was to be carried to its perfection at the court of Ferrara.

The house of Este had reached its height of prosperity at the epoch of the earliest national calamities. Descended

from one of the northern families which settled in Italy during the darkest period of the middle ages, the Este traced their lineal descent up to the times of Charlemagne. They had taken advantage of the frequent dissensions between the popes and the German emperors of the houses of Saxony and Swabia, and acquired wide dominions in Lunigiana, and the March of Treviso, where the castle of Este, their family residence, was situated. Towards the middle of the eleventh century, that family had been connected by marriages with the Guelphs of Bavaria, and one of the name of Este was eventually to become the common source, from which sprung the illustrious houses of Brunswick and Hanover*.

The Este had warmly espoused the Guelph party, during the wars of the Lombard League, and, according to the line of policy followed by the nobility of that age, they had often aspired and had been raised to the supreme magistracies at Padua, and in other Lombard free towns.

Towards the year 1200, Azzo V., Marquis of Este, married Marchesella degli Adelardi, daughter of one of the most conspicuous Guelphs at Ferrara, where the influence of the house of Este was thus first established.

The Este found themselves soon afterwards engaged in long struggles against Salinguerra, a valiant champion of the Ferrarese Ghibelines, during the stormy reigns of Otho IV. and Frederic II. Already since 1208 the Ferrarese, harassed by endless civil contests, had invested Azzo VI. with the supreme power; thus giving the first example in Italy of a town preferring a peaceful servitude to the enjoyment of a stormy and dangerous freedom. But the valour of Frederic II. and his partisans had since reduced the Este to the last extremities.

At last, after the death of Frederic, Azzo VII. took

* Adalberto, Marquis of Este, the earliest ancestor of the house known, flourished towards the beginning of the tenth century. The splendour of the house began with Oberto II., who flourished, A.D. 1020.

Salinguerra a prisoner by treason, and put himself at the head of the crusade that was preached against Ezzelino, the bloody lieutenant of Frederic, routed him at Cassano, and had the largest share of the spoils. (1259.)

Not long afterwards, when the pope armed Charles of Anjou to the extermination of the last Swabians, the Este were rewarded for their cooperation by the dominion of Reggio and Modena.

The success of that family is not so much to be attributed to the valour of its members as to their ambidexterous policy, to their opportune defections from the empire to the church, and from the Guelphs to the Ghibelines. The annals of the house of Este, however gilded over by the mythological traditions of Ariosto and Tasso, and by the all but historical narrative of Giambattista Pigna, the court historiographer, are stained by the memory of base treasons and startling crimes. Two of the reigning princes died by poison, another cleared his way to the throne by a double fratricide; and even Nicholas III., one of the noblest princes of his age, usurped the sovereignty of Parma by the murder of Ottobon Terzo, who had violently taken that city from the heirs of Gian Galeazzo Visconti. That same prince—for the inspired strains of the poet have recently brought fresh arguments against the hero's fame—obscured the glory of an otherwise irreproachable reign by the doleful tragedy of Parisina.

From Nicholas III., who reigned from 1393 to 1441, dates the first epoch of the patronage granted by the house of Este to the cultivators of literature. To this prince alone we are indebted for the foundation of two universities at Ferrara and Parma; Guarino da Verona and Giovanni Aurispa met with the most flattering reception at his court. To them he trusted the education of his children, Lionello and Borso, who, although illegitimate, reigned after him with the sanction of the pope, and to the prejudice of the lawful heir.

Lionello and Borso were reputed the most generous and accomplished princes in the country. That sovereignty which their ancestors had hitherto only established by usurpation, received, at last, the sanction of the emperor Frederic III., and Pope Paul II., by whom Borso was invested with the titles of Duke of Modena and Reggio in 1452, and of Ferrara in 1471.

Hercules I., the legitimate son of Nicholas III., and successor of Borso, after having secured his throne by putting to death his brother's sons, engaged in long, unequal contests against Rome, Venice, and Naples, from which he retreated with great loss. Towards the close of his reign his warlike spirit had considerably abated, and when the supreme hour of Italy had struck, at the epoch of the invasion of Charles VIII., Hercules protected his states by an armed neutrality, which allowed him leisure for literary pursuits.

His court became a refuge for the exiles of Lombardy and Tuscany. Boiardo was his friend and favourite. Francesco Bello had a share in his hospitality, and the young Ariosto was attached to his suite.

The splendour that the court of Ferrara had thus acquired, during four successive generations, had reached its highest degree at the beginning of the reign of Alphonso I. in 1505. Alphonso's second wife was Lucretia Borgia, the too famous daughter of Alexander VI. Whatever may be said of this fatal woman's conduct at the court of the pope, of her criminal intercourse with her father and brother, of her deeds of murder and poison—since even Lucretia has found in our days more than one advocate—she certainly lived a decent life after her third marriage, in Ferrara. She became the best ornament of her husband's court, and vied with him in that display of splendour and magnificence which crowded the halls of the ducal palace with the choicest chivalry and the noblest geniuses of Italy.

Alphonso was soon, however, involved in the wars of

those times. In 1509, he joined Louis XII. of France, Pope Julius II., and Maximilian of Austria, in the League of Cambray, anxious to avenge the injuries that his predecessors had endured from Venice. He persevered in his hostilities, even when that republic had come to a reconciliation with the pope, and when Julius had turned all the power of the holy league against the French, his former allies.

After the battle of Ravenna, Alphonso was, therefore, exposed to the resentment of Venice and Rome ; a mighty armament from the Adriatic sailed up the Po to the destruction of his capital, whilst Julius himself took the field against him. The duke stood his ground as he best could. The Venetian fleet was routed and dispersed, and the death of the implacable pope soon relieved him from his immediate apprehensions.

He, found, however, no better friends at Rome in the two popes of the house of Medici, nor did he rest tranquilly on his throne till after the coronation of Charles V. in 1531, when he was solemnly reinvested with the possession of his dominions.

Besides these external disturbances, domestic calamities contributed to agitate the reign of Alphonso.

Cardinal Hippolito, the duke's brother, in a fit of jealousy of one of his illegitimate brothers, Julio, ordered his eyes, of which a lady of Ferrara had, in an evil hour, spoken with all the warmth of feminine enthusiasm, to be torn from their sockets. This act of unheard-of cruelty was left unpunished ; but Ferdinand, another of Hercules' natural children, espousing the cause of his bereaved brother, entered with him into a conspiracy, directed to dethrone Alphonso and take full vengeance on the cardinal. The plot was discovered, and the conspirators were condemned to die a traitor's death. But, on the very scaffold, when the axe was suspended over their heads, Alphonso's clemency changed their doom into that of perpetual im-

prisonment. Ferdinand died in 1540, but Julio was living still in 1570, when he was released by Alphonso's successor, after fifty-four years of captivity.

The reigns of Hercules and Alphonso are signalised as the golden age of chivalrous poetry.

The chivalrous romances of Northern France, no less than the amatory verses of the Provençal troubadours, had, as I have mentioned elsewhere, made their way into Italy from their earliest origin. The frequent allusions to some of the most famous heroes of the round table and the paladins of Charlemagne, occurring in the Divine Comedy, are more than sufficient to show that such subjects were quite familiar in Italy in the age of Dante. During the following period the prevalence of democratic ideas, and the study of the works of antiquity, had thrown those rude legends into comparative insignificance. Still what remains in our days of some of them, such as "*I reali di Francia*," "*La Spagna*," "*Buovo d'Antona*," etc., probably written towards the beginning of the fifteenth century, are an irrefragable proof that such performances still found favour in the eyes of the multitude, when Pulci first conceived the idea of introducing a composition of a similar nature to the attention of Lorenzo de Medici and Lucretia Tornabuoni, his mother, to enliven their guests at the close of their sumptuous banquets.

The scene of "*Morgante Maggiore*" is laid at the court of Charlemagne, and the main catastrophe consists of that famous rout of Roncevalles, where Orlando and the flower of the French paladins found their death.

But neither the poet nor his audience were calculated to enter into the true spirit of chivalrous poetry. At the close of the fifteenth century the belief in the marvellous had considerably abated. The long extinction of the feudal orders, the long prevalence of burgherish habits, the active pursuits of commerce and industry, had, especially in Florence, extinguished those lofty ideas of devotion and

loyalty which were, in fact, the soul and breath of chivalry. A warlike spirit had indeed been revived in Italy by the establishment of bands of national militia, and the Italian condottieri, or soldiers of fortune, wandered like the ancient knights all over Europe, though rather in search of plunder than in quest of adventure. Tilts and tournaments were not unfrequent, and Lorenzo de Medici and his brother, Julian, had in their youth distinguished themselves in similar feats of arms in the eyes of their countrymen.

But the general corruption of manners had long since undermined all noble feelings of honour, faith and loyalty; and hearts beat now cold and base under their corslets of steel. Those adventures which the ancient romancers related with imperturbable gravity would have sounded no less tedious than strange to the ears of men whose faith was languid and sceptic, whose valour was wily and mercenary.

Hence Pulci wrote a heroi-comic poem. He gave us a parody of those chivalrous legends from which his subject was drawn. He attempted in Italy, though rather clumsily, that revolution which Cervantes accomplished one hundred years later in Spain. His choice of the vulgar tongue—as the language of Dante was then blasphemously called—already announced a gay subject, for whoever had any serious object in view must necessarily have written in Latin.

The example of Pulci, however, soon engendered, or rather increased a taste for that style of poetry. The courts of Mantua and Ferrara were soon seized with emulous ambition. Francesco Bello, or il Cieco di Ferrara, sung his “Mambriano” at the court of the Gonzaga, probably at the same time that Boiardo read the cantos of his “Orlando Innamorato” before Hercules of Este.

Matteo Maria Boiardo, Count of Scandiano, a man of refined taste and high feelings, versified an old chronicle of

Charlemagne, by a rather strange anachronism, attributed to Turpin, Archbishop of Paris and contemporary with the French emperor, but for the authenticity of which we must rest satisfied with the authority of Pope Calixtus II., who, in 1122, published a bull to the effect of sanctioning its validity.

It seems quite evident that Boiardo set about his task in a sportive humour, and the greatest part of his poem is filled up with half-comic adventures; but the poet's heart warms with his subject, it sympathises with the feelings of his imaginary heroes, it suffers itself to be taken by surprise, and carried off by his enthusiasm to the fairy-land of his fictions.

Few poets ever displayed such a wonderful power of invention. Out of those sterile absurdities of the poor French archbishop, the Italian poet has drawn an inextricable web, in which the reader's mind is lost in amazement. It seems as if even the minstrel's fancy was bewildered in that boundless labyrinth. After having gone through fifty long cantos, the poem was left unfinished, whether in consequence of the invasion of Charles VIII. and of the poet's death, which took place late in the same year, or because he began to despair of drawing that widespread plan to a close, it would now be difficult to decide*.

The achievement of Boiardo's work was left for the still wider fancy of Ariosto.

This poet issued from a noble house which had, towards the middle of the fourteenth century, been allied by marriage to the reigning family of Este. His father was governor of Reggio in 1474, when Ludovico was born. Ariosto came young and friendless to the court of Ferrara, accompanied by his widowed mother, and nine brothers

* Boiardo, Matteo Maria, Count of Scandiano, born, A.D. 1434; died, December 1494. First edition of his poem. Scandiano, 1495. "Sonetti e Canzoni." Reggio, 1499.

and sisters, who, after his father's death, depended on him, as the eldest, for their subsistence.

Nearly all that is known of his life is to be gathered from his *Satires*, in which, with great ingenuousness and singleness of heart, he communicates with his friends on many topics of domestic affliction.

The life of Ariosto is not much of a romance, nor was there any thing in the outward man that betrayed the poet. To an upright, cheerful disposition he added a latent feeling of independence, a defensive pride, which was put to sore trials during his intercourse with the great, whose favour he was, on account of his needy family, compelled to solicit.

At first he attached himself to Cardinal Hippolito, by whom he was hard worked and poorly paid. Ariosto followed the fortunes of his patron during the wars of the League of Cambray, and fought with distinguished valour at that naval battle on the Po, where the blue eagle of Este prevailed over the winged lion of St. Mark. He was repeatedly sent as an ambassador to the court of Julius II., and on one occasion, when none else volunteered to brave the resentment of the incensed pontiff. Ariosto was received at the Vatican with frowns and menaces; according to his biographer he even ran the greatest risk of being thrown into the Tiber, by the order of Julius, whose very dying words breathed fire and vengeance against Alphonso of Este.

The services of Ariosto were unhandsomely rewarded. Cardinal Hippolito, in whose pay the poet had spent fourteen years of his life—whose name he had transmitted to immortality in his poem, never allowed him a moment of rest. To escort the vain prelate in all solemn occurrences, to attend his levees, and follow him in his journeys, lost in the crowd of his minions, was more than the novice in courtly arts could learn to endure: so that, being at last invited to travel with him beyond the Alps, where the car-

dinal had been promoted to a distant archbishopric, Ariosto did not hesitate to purchase his beloved independence by the loss of his scanty emolument.

Deprived of the cardinal's support, and harassed by poverty, the poet was reminded of a friendly intimacy that had existed between him and Giovanni de Medici long before his exaltation to the pontifical see. Every day tidings were brought to him of the magnificent style, of the profuse liberality of Leo X. at Rome. To Rome the poet resolved to remove; and, having gained an easy access, he offered to throw himself on his knees before the pope; but Leo would not allow his old friend to stoop to kiss his pontifical foot. He rose from the chair of St. Peter, and kissed his forehead—a mark of favour for which the proudest monarch would have sued in vain.

Ariosto thought that brighter days had finally dawned. Full of the most sanguine expectations, but bespattered with rain and mud, he made his way back to his inn, where he waited in vain for the shower of bounties which the sunshine of papal favour had given him reason to look forward to. But whether the ill-starred poet was lost sight of in the crowd of flatterers by which the throne of Leo was besieged, or whether the hatred, which that pope had inherited from his predecessor, Julius, against Alphonso of Este, was indiscriminately extended to all his subjects and dependants, it would be no easy task to determine. All that is well known is, that that benign accolade is all that Ariosto ever received at the hands of Leo; and that, profiting by the lessons of experience, he refused to undertake a new journey to Rome, when, later in life, his friends wished to appoint him ambassador of Alphonso to the court of Clement VII.

At last, Duke Alphonso himself—of whom, if we except his inhuman severity against his nearest relatives, it must be said that he was a generous prince—proved a better friend and supporter to the bard who had so loftily heralded

the glories of his house. But by that strange misapplication of talent, so common in that age, which destined the dreaming poet, or the absent-minded scholar, to the discharge of arduous political and diplomatic offices, Ariosto was appointed by his patron to the government of Garfagnana, a wild district in the Apennines, for which the Este had to endure the most serious struggles against the republic of Lucca, and which they had recently secured, all riotous and rebellious, in their grasp.

This troublesome and dangerous dignity, which one of Ariosto's biographers very aptly compares to Sancho Panza's government of the isle Barattaria, the poet filled for three years; during which his mildness and amiability, his disinterestedness and impartiality, got the better of the stubborn race he had been sent to subdue. The fame of his genius had established his popularity even among those lawless bandits of the forest, in whose hands he had more than once the ill luck to fall, but by whom he was not only allowed to pass unmolested, but even cordially received, and escorted with every mark of honour and regard.

At the expiration of the third year of his reign, he was allowed to enjoy the peace of his humble but comfortable retirement at Ferrara, where his time was chiefly employed in the direction of the theatre, opened by the munificence of Alphonso, and on which he gave his four comedies in verse.

He died in 1533, about a twelvemonth after the ceremony of his coronation by the hand of the emperor Charles V. had, according to a somewhat vague tradition, taken place in Mantua*.

Ariosto grew up among the general admiration of all Italy, but especially of the court of Ferrara, for the work of Boiardo. And yet, notwithstanding this unanimous suf-

* "L' Orlando Furioso," A.D. 1516-1532. "Satire," "Commedie," etc. Complete edition of Ariosto's works, Venice, 1772.

frage, the "Orlando Innamorato" was neither a correct nor a finished work. The style was thought to be harsh and uncouth; the language full of Lombard provincialisms. Soon after the author's death, obscure poets had either continued or re-written nearly every stanza of the poem; but Berni, a Florentine of unequalled wit, and rare fertility of poetical vein, the inventor of a new style of buffoon poetry, that received its name from him, undertook the remoulding of the whole poem*.

The work of Berni was, however, only published in 1541, when the poem of Ariosto had mainly contributed to recall the public attention to the original source from which it was avowedly derived.

No poem ever opened with a wider and loftier commencement than that of Boiardo.

The production of an immense host of kings and queens, sultans and sultanesses, warriors and warrioresses, and the descriptions of their horses, armour, and pageantry, did not offer a sufficient scope for the poet's fancy. Not satisfied with the wide regions of the gloomy North, and of the golden East, nor with the ample resources of the kingdom of nature, he went beyond all mortal limits, and crowded the air, the waters, and woods, with most heterogeneous spirits, benevolent, malevolent, from the abyss, from the sea, from the grave; all the visible and invisible became the domain of chivalrous poetry.

The hyppogriffs, winged horses, were seen soaring with their knights above the region of the storms; whales swam across the main, nourishing in their bosom churches, steeples, and inhabited convents. Castles arose in one night, with walls of steel and roofs of adamant, with en-

* Francesco Berni, born towards A.D. 1500; lived at the court of Clement VII. and Alexander de Medici; charged by this last to poison Cardinal Hippolito, his cousin or brother; he refused; died, poisoned by the duke himself, 1536. His works, besides the "Orlando," "Rime," "Capitoli," etc.

chanted gardens and labyrinths, speaking statues, spell-bound horses, and souls prophesying from their mouldering graves; with fountains of love, of hatred, of oblivion, springing from the neighbouring forest; with ruthless giants, tamed lions, men turned into birds or brutes—all moving as if in a vast magic circle around. Life was multiplied by a thousand supernatural contrivances, and communicated to the most unyielding or uncorporeal substances.

If there could be any thing more difficult for a human mind than to lay down the plan for so vast a conception, it must have been to take up its various threads, where they had been broken up by the mighty weaver, and lead them to an easy and gradual conclusion.

This was the work of Ariosto.

The poem of Boiardo was left interrupted at the moment in which, at the landing of the Saracen monarchs of Africa and Asia, and the irruption of the Moors of Spain, the great struggle between the cross and the crescent, the great anti-crusade, commenced; that of Ariosto ended with the final dispersion of the followers of the prophet.

But this main story was only a diminutive part of that immense romance. The ladies and knights, the arms and loves, the courtesies and daring achievements, which form its theme, give origin to a thousand new episodes, eternally diverging, converging, but always strictly, inseparably belonging to the subject. The heroes, led astray with so much apparent freedom and wantonness, roaming by land and sea, to heaven, hell, and purgatory—bewildered, enamoured, vow-bound, spell-bound, wounded, or prisoners, are always sure to reappear, dead or alive, at the best opportunity. All those natural or supernatural agents are moved without the slightest appearance of effort, like men on a chess-board by the hand of a skilful player—like spirits subservient to the wand of an enchanter.

In the midst of that vast confusion, it is not difficult to

feel the influence of that art, admirably enhanced by a careful concealment of art, that sovereign mind presiding over the whole, that unity which has power to subject immensity to its laws, that sovereign mind always serene, always at ease, while it grants us no rest; and we delight in the contemplation of its vastness, we like to run after its boldest flight, to abandon ourselves to its playful humour, in the same manner as one of the knights of those fables, in his hour of perplexity, lets the reins loose on the neck of his charger, to be led by the instinct of the sagacious animal.

So much for the work of imagination. But when, after making a sport of himself and his readers, the poet ventures on a sudden appeal to our sympathies; when he paints man abandoned to himself, grappling with superhuman difficulties, with no tutelar genius but his steady will, no enchanted shield but his undaunted virtue—the world of fiction suddenly disappears from our eyes, and there we stand, as if suddenly converted to the belief of those fables which had been woven in a spirit of jest and raillery.

Be it remarked, that a reaction in favour of chivalry had taken place in Lombardy at least, if not in Florence, in the times of Ariosto. The restoration of monarchical and feudal orders at Milan, Mantua, and Ferrara, the frequent intercourse with French and Spaniards, the most chivalrous nations of Europe; the example of the brilliant court of Francis I., *le roi chevalier*, who revived the manners of ancient paladins; the rare exploits, and the noble character of the *preux* Bayard, from whose hands the French king was proud of receiving the order of knighthood, after the battle of Marignano—a state of continual warfare, especially in the south of Italy, where it assumed altogether a chivalrous aspect; the frequent recurrence of private engagements, such as the duel between Bayard and Soto-

mayor; the combat between ten French and ten Spanish knights, at Trani, and the other between thirteen French and thirteen Italian men-at-arms at Barletta—all these contemporaneous events contributed to reawaken a warlike ardour, a spirit of chivalrous extravagance, which wonderfully increased during the whole of the sixteenth century, miserably contrasting with the general corruption and degeneracy of an enslaved race.

Boiardo and Ariosto both belonged by birth to noble, and, to a certain extent, feudal families. Both had borne arms in signal encounters; and the court of a prince for so many years engaged in the most disastrous campaigns, must, by necessity, have been wrought up to a feverish mood of warlike excitement. There are epochs in history in which men's minds run into opposite extremes with gigantic strides. During the interval between Lorenzo de Medici and Alphonso of Ferrara, the whole country had undergone as rapid and as complete a revolution as it did afterwards, during nearly an equal number of years, in the age of Napoleon.

Hence Boiardo's work was not, like that of Pulci, altogether meant for a burlesque work, till it appeared under the disguise of Berni's parody; and, although the livelier fancy of Ariosto often led him into fits of jocose extravagance, still there are frequent passages in which he is evidently in earnest.

Such are, for instance, the outbursts of noble disdain with which his favourite hero, Ruggiero, throws away his enchanted shield, and Orlando the arquebuss of King Cimosco, scorning the idea of owing their victory to unnatural advantages. Such is the invective of the poet against that German contrivance which so powerfully contributed to eclipse the splendour of chivalry by neutralising the main advantages of personal strength and prowess—the invention of gunpowder. Such his appeals to all the

powers of Europe to put an end to their fraternal dissensions, and join in a common league against the threatening power of the Infidels.

Such, in short, are the characters of Ruggiero, Brandimarte, Zerbino, and other Christian knights, all alive to the noblest feelings, and not less admirable for loyalty, honour, and courtesy, than for headlong impetuosity of valour. It was thus that chivalrous poetry was called back to its primitive grandeur, and prepared to assume the majestic dignity of the genius of Tasso.

Every one is well aware that Ariosto is a descriptive rather than a sentimental writer; rather the poet of imagination than the heart. But, although the natural buoyancy of his mind did not suffer him to dwell on melancholy subjects, yet he breaks forth in a few short and fugitive, but highly pathetic episodes, the more impressive, perhaps, and irresistible as they are unexpected. It seems as if, almost unawares, his fingers had fallen on the softest strings of his harp, and the tear lingered faint and reluctant on his unconscious eyes.

But Ariosto's peculiar charm lies in the grace, ease, and elegance of his—by turns grave or pathetic, sublime or sportive, and sometimes even designedly neglected, but—always fresh, fertile, inimitable style. In imitation of the minstrels from which his subject is taken, he displays that rare spontaneousness which was in him the result of long, arduous labour and care, but which has all the appearance of extemporaneous effusion. He will at times repeat the last words of one stanza as the beginning of the next, like the narrator of a tale who, by such repetitions, seems to stop to take breath and collect his ideas.

Ariosto is the poet of youth, as Dante is the friend and companion of mature age. So far as the office of poetry can be merely to afford an easy and—with the exception of a few cantos—innocent delight; so far as it can have no other aim than to give rise to a rapid succession of in-

finitely varied and always pleasing emotions, without pointing to any determined object, without proving or illustrating any important truth—Ariosto fulfilled a poet's mission.

As such, indeed, he has no parallel in any age or country—none, except perhaps that modern enchanter who dared to revive chivalry in this our sober, positive age ; and even he, whose genius seemed above all titles, was proud of the appellation of “ the Ariosto of the North.”

CHAPTER III.

TASSO.

Alamanni—Bernardo Tasso—Torquato—His Misfortunes—Catherine de Medici—Religious Persecution in Italy—The House of Gonzaga—of Urbino—of Savoy—Tasso's Imprisonment—Jerusalem Delivered—Revival of the Spirit of the Crusades—Italian Drama—Aminta and Pastor Fido.

A NEW and extensive road to fame had no sooner been opened by the successful experiments of Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto, than a swarm of minor poets launched into the chivalrous arena. The Chronicles of Turpin being exhausted, the turn next came for King Arthur, the Amadis, and a hundred more warriors of British and Spanish descent. Numberless volumes of those chivalrous poems encumber to this day the shelves of Italian libraries, whence even the curiosity of our inquisitive age is seldom tempted to remove them.

There let them remain, not excepting even the "Giron Cortese" and "Avarchide" of Luigi Alamanni, notwithstanding the blind partiality with which the first of these romances was set up for some time as the rival of the "Furioso," and notwithstanding the regard which we owe to the author's name.

Alamanni, whose fame is now rather attached to his didactic poem, "La Coltivazione," a cold but once much admired imitation of Virgil's Georgics,—was one of the warmest propugners of Florentine liberty, and found him-

self involved in its last downfall. He repaired to the court of France, where he lived and died, honoured with the esteem and friendship of the chivalrous king*.

No more notice shall be taken of the "*Amadigi di Gaula*," a Spanish romance, versified again and again by Bernardo Tasso, and brought to the prodigious length of one hundred cantos, in four quarto volumes, with more perseverance than success.

To the memory of this bard also, and to his moral character, a tribute of encomium is due. Tasso, a native of Bergamo, issued from an illustrious family, the ruins of whose castle are still standing, and the remote posterity still living in that mountainous region,—started from his father's mansion early in youth, in quest of adventures. These were many and various. He lived for a long while in a state of great poverty in Rome, attached to the triumphal chariot of Tullia d'Aragona, the famous Aspasia of Italy. Later in life he was received at the court of Sanseverino, prince of Salerno, and was blessed with a few years of tranquillity at Sorrento, where he married Porzia de Rossi, a noble and accomplished Neapolitan lady.

Meanwhile, the prince his patron, involved in those tumults and conspiracies by which the people and the nobility of Naples resisted the instalment of the Spanish Inquisition, was driven into exile, where Bernardo followed him, with a faith and loyalty worthy of Amadis himself†.

It was during the short reprieve that Bernardo had from

* Luigi Alamanni, born at Florence, A.D. 1495; emigrated to France, 1523; returned, 1527; once more an exile, 1530; ambassador of Francis I. to Charles V., 1544; died, 1551. "*Giron Cortese*," Paris, 1548. "*Avarchide*," 1567. "*La Coltivazione*."

† Bernardo Tasso, born, A.D. 1493; established at Salerno, 1531; married, 1539; Torquato, born, March 11, 1544; Bernardo left Naples, 1547; death of his wife, 1556; Bernardo invited to the court of Urbino, 1557; of Mantua, 1563; died, 1569. "*L' Amadigi*," first edition, Venice, 1560.

the persecution of fortune, that his son was born at Sorrento.

Torquato is to Italy the dearest of poets. Dante was undoubtedly gifted with a more profound genius; Ariosto endowed with a wider fancy; but the Italians are partial to Tasso, on account of his sufferings: they love him because he was sovereignly unfortunate; and they feel as if the injustice by which his heart was broken, could be partly atoned for by an universal sympathy in his long career of wretchedness.

Before and after Torquato the world had witnessed more piercing griefs, more startling disasters,—sorrows in which a superior mind seems to delight and pride itself, demanding rather our reverence than our commiseration,—evils by which Providence makes a trial of our powers of endurance, to temper and refine the substance of our soul, and fit it for its high destination. Dante and Tasso had equally to struggle against the storms of life; but the proud soul of the former bore him up against fate, and he seemed to rise greater and nobler at every new blast of adversity; whilst the sensitive mind of the latter sank under the infliction of torture, and was cast ashore miserably shattered and wrecked.

Had fortune been less busy in heaping calamities on his head; had human malignity relented from long persecution, Torquato would have been equally industrious in working out his own misery:—melancholy was the fatal allotment of that great soul: it stole over his heart at its first opening; it sat upon him like an incubus—a dead weight—blasting, consuming.

This fatal predisposition developed itself in his juvenile tastes—in the morbid sensibilities of his passionate temper. It was a slow disease silently preying within—a mourning cloud hanging on his pale brow, obscuring the immortal lamp of genius lighted in his eyes, casting its death-like shade on all objects around.

The eyes of Brutus were never moistened by tears : no smile, it is said, ever played on the lips of Torquato. His morn of life arose in gloom : from his earliest boyhood he was the son of an exile ; he was torn from his mother's arms, who died of a broken heart not long afterwards ; his nearest relatives turned out his envenomed adversaries ; wandering and poverty became the lot of the young poet ; and from that state he was in an evil hour relieved by the favour of the great, only to be plunged into greater distress.

Tasso was invited to the court of Ferrara in 1565.

There reigned then at Ferrara, since 1559, Alphonso II., son of Hercules II., and grandson of the first Alphonso, the patron of Ariosto. This young prince, vain and arrogant, no less than mean and selfish, who lavished the treasures laid up by the providence of his predecessors in vain struggles for the pre-eminence against the Duke of Tuscany, Cosmo I., and in no less idle schemes for his succession to the throne of Poland, prided himself, after the example of his ancestors, in eclipsing all the princes of Italy in the splendour of his courtly entertainments, and in the ample bounties he bestowed on talent of every kind.

He was then engaged in his extravagant preparations for the celebration of his marriage with the daughter of Ferdinand, king of the Romans : the house of Este had now reached its greatest lustre, and the pomp of its court outshone the splendour of the most powerful monarchs of Europe.

Tasso was first attached to the numerous retinue of the Cardinal of Este, Ludovico, the duke's brother ; but he was soon brought into contact with all the members of the family, and with its stately and accomplished ladies, the sisters of Alphonso, Lucretia, afterwards Duchess of Urbino, and the fatal Leonora.

Whether the juvenile admiration and devotion of Torquato for this proud beauty ever assumed the character of

a more tender and dangerous passion ;—by what stages the intimacy between two beings so differently situated became the main instrument that clouded the serenity of that doomed mind ;—how far the sympathising princess shared the flame that her charms or her virtues had kindled in her bard's breast, or, in the incautious gratification of feminine coquetry, she fostered the daring hopes of her ardent worshipper—are questions of the most difficult solution.

Every one of Tasso's biographers agrees in this alone : that his attachment to Leonora of Este was the remotest cause of his long misfortunes—the rest is made up by vain conjectures, vague rumours, and even daring falsehoods, from which the real truth will never be thoroughly extricated.

Evil, however, did not prevail at once against him. On the contrary, he was allowed to enjoy an hour of unalloyed bliss, surrounded, as he found himself in the prime of his life, with the radiancy of courtly favour, and all the *prestige* of premature fame.

Towards the close of the year 1570, Tasso was requested to accompany the Cardinal of Este to the court of France, whither that prelate was sent as a legate of his brother.

Italians were then sure of a hearty reception at Paris.

The name of another cardinal of Este, Hippolito, (a nephew of Hippolito I., the patron of Ariosto,) was highly revered and cherished in a country where he stood forward as a warm lover and promoter of letters and arts. Charles IX. reigned then in France, and Catherine de Medici reigned over him, as well as over all her weak and effeminate, though, on the whole, kind and affable children. Under Catherine's patronage, those among the Italians who had followed the standards of France during that long period of wars, the numerous exiles from the never-ending commotions of the Italian states, and all, in fact, whose valour, or learning, or any other accomplishment, recom-

mended them to royal favour, never failed to meet with a cordial reception at the court of the successors of Francis I.

The descendants and relatives of the noble Trivulzio, the heirs of the name of that last of the Florentines, Filippo Strozzi, were still distinguished by daring feats of arms at the head of the French armies and fleets, while the pursuits of learning at the university and the edifices of the metropolis began to feel the impulse, and to bear the marks, of Italian genius.

The times, however, were, at that epoch, big with ominous events. Murder and treason presided over the councils of Catherine.

Placed between the opposite factions of two proud rebellious houses, the Guises and Bourbons, to whom the popular bigotry of religious opinions afforded an easy pretext for conspiring against the throne, the French court was then probably maturing its atrocious plan for the summary execution of St. Bartholomew's eve.

That tragedy took place less than a twelvemonth after Torquato's visit to Paris, Aug. 24, 1572. But if all the traditions attached to that deed of bloodshed be true—for more recent writers have laboured to remove the odium of that long-premeditated crime from the heads against which the unanimous execration of that age had laid it—the bard must have been surprised by the smiles with which the haughty Medici encouraged the Protestant lords, then all-powerful at court, while her inmost heart was beating with joy at the thriving prospect of her murderous schemes—and the hand which King Charles held out to the hoary Coligni was ready to grasp the arquebuss against the hunted-down Huguenots, who repaired for a shelter to the walls of the Louvre, and loudly claimed the fulfilment of his royal promises.

Tasso,—whose education under the Jesuits at Rome, and enthusiastic disposition, had early inspired him with rigid and gloomy religious feelings, very nearly bordering

on bigotry and fanaticism; whom all the reassurances of his friends, and his frequent consultations with the grand inquisitor at Ferrara, could scarcely reconcile to his boding conscience; and who was kept in a constant alarm lest he should give way to the heretic doubts that assailed him,—now was shocked at the apparent familiarity with which the sectarians of Calvin were treated in a Catholic court. His zeal appeared extreme even to his patron, Cardinal Ludovico, who, probably, entered with more sagacity into the views of Catherine de Medici. The consequence was, that at the close of a rather warm controversy on that subject, Torquato, wounded by the high tone which the prelate assumed towards his dependant, quitted the Louvre, after nearly a year's residence, and, travelling across the Alps, reappeared at Rome in January 1572.

Italy and Rome presented at that epoch a very different scene from that apparent calm and concord then prevailing at the court of Paris.

The days of religious forbearance and fashionable scepticism were long since over, when the doctrines of Protestantism were not unfavourably listened to even by members of the sacred college; when Swiss and German reformers numbered among their proselytes some of the eminent men and the noblest ladies in Italy; when Calvin found a refuge at the court of Ferrara, where the Duchess Renée, daughter of Louis XII. of France and married to Hercules II. of Este, had warmly embraced the new doctrines, and appointed its most zealous supporters to the education of her children.

Times were sadly changed.

The tribunal of the Inquisition, instituted at Rome by order of Paul III., under the influence of Cardinal Caraffa, and other evenomed enemies of Lutheranism, had extended its havoc all over the country*.

* The Inquisition re-established at Rome by Paul III., July 21, 1542.

That same Caraffa, when raised to the pontificate in 1555, under the name of Paul IV., carried persecution to an extremity unexampled in the annals of his predecessors, the irascible but high-minded Paul III., and the voluptuary, Julius III. The Duchess of Ferrara was the first visited by his pontifical wrath. Deprived of all intercourse with her friends, separated from her children, overwhelmed with the bitter upbraidings of her ungenerous husband, and harassed by the admonitions of her relatives from France, she was, until her husband's death, little better than a prisoner in her palace.

If the authority of the pope met with no resistance on the part of the proudest princes in Italy, it will be easily perceived that the multitude could have no protection against it.

In vain did the republic of Venice firmly oppose the introduction of the Holy Office into its territories, braving the thunders of the Vatican. In vain did Milan and Naples again and again rise in open and successful rebellions against the agents of the Spanish Inquisition, backed as they were by the victorious armies of Charles V. and Philip II. Papal stratagem and dexterity succeeded where open violence had failed. The ministers of the Holy Office from Rome met with a more favourable reception than the Spanish Dominicans. Their proceedings were milder and more cautious, their executions were enveloped in mystery; but the very awe of those deeds of darkness had a more appalling effect on the multitude than the glare of the burning piles of Seville and Toledo.

The reign of Paul IV. was signalised by a long series of awful butcheries. The republic of Venice, whilst refusing admission to the Roman inquisitors, had taken on itself the responsibility of extirpating heresy from its territories. It acted according to the measures of its tenebrous policy. Hundreds of victims were thrown into

its dungeons, rowed out at dead of night, and sunk into the silent lagoon.

The Dukes of Ferrara and Tuscany, wishing to rid themselves of the odium inseparable from those executions, resigned their right of jurisdiction over such of their subjects as were suspected of heterodoxy, and oftentimes gave up their very best friends to the ecclesiastical courts, or sent them as a propitiatory offering to Rome; whilst the Holy Office of that city boasted, as a proof of rare humanity, that its victims were beheaded or strangled previous to being consigned to the flames.

A more atrocious work of desolation was in the meantime carried on in Calabria. Under pretence of political rebellion, a lawless soldiery was let loose against a poor inoffensive district, where a few colonists of Waldenses had been thriving unmolested for more than two centuries. Their brethren in the valleys of the Alps fared little better under the rule of the house of Savoy.

The Grisons, Valais, and other cantons of Switzerland, Germany, and England, swarmed with Italian exiles for religious opinions; among them men conspicuous for genius and learning, such as Paul Vergerio, Ochino, Peter Martyr, Celio Secundo Curio, and a multitude of labourers and artisans, with whom industry for ever transmigrated beyond the Alps*.

* Bernardino Ochino, born at Siena, A.D. 1487; a Capuchin, 1534; a favourite with Clement VII. and Paul III.; embraced the reformed opinions, 1540; repaired to Geneva and married, 1542; went to England, 1547; obliged to leave England, repaired to Strasburg, 1553; minister of an Italian Church at Zurich, 1555; banished from Zurich, travelled to Moravia and Poland, 1563; died in Moravia, 1564. His works printed, 1543.—Peter Paul Vergerio, a papal nuncio at the diet of Augsburg, 1530; sent again to Germany by Paul III.; his conferences with Luther, 1535; sent to the diet of Worms, 1541; won over to Protestantism; persecuted at Venice and Mantua; died at Tübingen, 1566.—Peter Martyr Vermigli, born at Florence, 1500; an Augustinian monk, 1526; emigrated to Zurich and Strasburg; married a German nun, 1544;

A reaction took place at Rome at the death of Paul IV., in 1550, when the infuriated Roman populace threw open the dungeons of the Inquisition, burnt the house to the ground, and perpetrated the most violent outrages against the memory of the bloody pope and the members of his family.

His successor, Pius IV.—Angelo de Medici, brother of the famous hero and adventurer, the Marquis of Marignano, one of the greatest generals of Charles V.—seemed inclined to mild and conciliatory measures; but on the accession of Pius V., in 1566, the work of persecution recommenced with unprecedented fury. Autos-da-fé were performed almost every day before the eyes of the terrified Romans; and when Torquato was admitted to kiss the foot of the truculent pontiff, the ashes of the heroic Carnesecchi, and of the righteous Aonio Paleario, were almost still smoking on their pyres*.

Notwithstanding all his zeal for the cause of religion, Tasso could not behold such atrocious scenes without horror. From Rome, therefore, he soon repaired to Fer-

appointed professor of Divinity at Oxford, 1549; obliged to quit Oxford, retired to London, 1550; persecuted by the rabble in London; obliged to quit England, 1553; went over to Zurich and Geneva; died at Zurich, 1562.—The remains of his wife unburied and burnt at Oxford, 1552.—Celio Secundo Curio, born at Turin, 1503; converted to Protestantism, 1523; arrested at Turin, and escaped from the prison of the Holy Office, 1532; a professor of belles lettres at Pavia; defended by his pupils against the agents of the Inquisition, 1540; emigrated to Lausanne, 1547; died at Bale, 1567.

* Pietro Carnesecchi, of Florence; apostolical prothonotary under Clement VII.; converted to Protestantism by Juan Valdez, in Naples, A.D. 1534; cited before the Inquisition at Rome, 1546; emigrated to Paris, 1552; cited once more to Rome, and excommunicated, 1559; dissuaded by Cosmo I., of Tuscany, from emigrating to Geneva; given up by Cosmo to the inquisitors; sent to Rome, 1565; burnt, 1567.—Aonio Paleario, of Veroli; professor at Siena, 1534; at Lucca, 1543; at Milan, 1550; burnt, 1570. His works published, Jena, 1728.

rara, where the good offices of the duke's sisters had bent his mind to grant the poet a friendly reception.

Restored to courtly favour, during this short interval of prosperity Tasso actively pursued those of his works that have mostly contributed to commend his name to posterity, but which likewise drew down upon him the shafts of courtly envy and calumny; the "*Aminta*," and the "*Jerusalem Delivered*."

From the epoch of the first acting of his pastoral drama in 1572, and the circulation of a few cantos of his epic poem, the attacks of criticism—to which he unfortunately attached more importance, and which affected him more painfully than is the case with most men of really superior intellect—allowed him scarcely an instant of rest. Torquato saw, or perhaps only fancied he saw, in the duke some disposition to listen to and encourage his adversaries. That these were many and various, when we consider the poet's popularity at home and abroad, no less than the vehemence, austerity, and haughtiness of his temper—may be easily believed; and we can also readily perceive that Alphonso, already predisposed against Tasso, by what he considered his disrespectful conduct towards the cardinal his brother, and by some vague suspicion of the rash ambitious passion that glowed ill-concealed in the poet's bosom, had altered his manners towards him, and made him aware of the little chance he had of withstanding the wily arts of flattery and duplicity that were brought to bear against him.

This he felt, and, assailed by a hundred doubts and apprehensions, enfeebled by bodily sufferings, and haunted by religious scruples—perhaps also in the hope that absence would have a healing effect on his love-sick heart, he was determined on quitting Ferrara.

His intent transpired, and the jealous duke had recourse to every means, fair or foul, to prevent his escape. Torquato's proud and independent soul perceived with

indignation that all his movements were closely watched, and found himself the centre of a wide-spread system of espionage, by which he felt as a prisoner at his patron's court.

Tasso's resentment was equal to the insult. It led to that long series of rash and violent outbursts of passion, to those sudden escapes from Ferrara, and long wanderings throughout Italy—to his pious sister's lonely house at Sorrento, to Venice, to Mantua and Urbino, whence he always fled as if urged on by his evil demon in quest of new terrors and sufferings.

And yet he had, both at Urbino and Mantua, warm and powerful friends.

The Gonzaga, then a numerous and illustrious family, had been lately indemnified for the long adversities they had to endure during the usurpations of Visconti and Sforza, and the successive invasions of French, Swiss, and Germans in Lombardy*.

The Gonzaga, from their first exaltation in the fourteenth century, were highly distinguished as warriors, and offered their services to the leading powers of Italy, particularly to the republic of Venice, their natural ally, against the lords of Milan. One of them, Giovan Francesco, then marquis of Mantua, commanded the forces of the Italian allies at Fornovo, in 1495, when, owing to want of discipline, he was frustrated in his attempt to arrest Charles VIII. of France, in his hasty retreat from his conquest of Naples.

His successors, after long wavering, had espoused the cause of the Emperor Charles V., who erected the marquisate of Mantua into a duchy, and, after the extinction

* The Gonzaga, unknown before the thirteenth century. The greatness of the house began A.D. 1328, when Luigi Gonzaga, to avenge an insult offered to one of the ladies of his family, by a well-managed conspiracy put to death Passerino de' Bonacossi, lord of Mantua, with all his kindred, and succeeded him in the sovereignty of that city.

of the heroic house of Montferrat, invested the Gonzaga with the sovereignty of that state, in open violation of the rights of the house of Savoy. The reigning duke was now Guglielmo, (1570-1587,) a weak and voluptuous, though a generous prince; but, broken down by age and infirmity, he suffered himself to be ruled by his eldest son, Vincenzo Gonzaga, an unprincipled libertine.

This young prince—whose extravagances in domestic life, whose divorce and second marriage had already scandalised the whole country—who had stabbed his tutor, the admirable Crichton, from Scotland, in a drunken brawl, in the streets of Mantua—had, perhaps, no other merit than that of having, in all circumstances, constantly befriended Torquato.

Another branch of the Gonzaga family then reigned at Guastalla; one of whom, Scipio Gonzaga, afterwards a cardinal, had lived with Tasso at the university of Padua in terms of fraternal familiarity. He had instituted in that town the academy of the Etereï, of which Torquato was a member, and continued his friend and correspondent to the end of his life.

The throne of Urbino was then occupied by Francesco Maria II. della Rovere, who had, in 1570, married Lucretia of Este. This princess seemed, indeed, to prefer the residence of her brother's court, at Ferrara, to the company of her husband, who loved her not. But in her absence, as well as during her residence, Tasso was always sure of a warm reception at Urbino.

The Della Rovere owed its earliest origin to the favour of Pope Sixtus IV., one of the family, who was the son of a fisherman from Savona, and who raised his nephew, John della Rovere, to the sovereignty of Sinigaglia and Camerino, and Julian (afterwards Pope Julius II.) to the cardinalate. Sextus, however, showed more tenderness towards his sister's sons, Pietro and Girolamo Riario,

whom he raised to the most important dignities of the church.

Both families were, after his death, brought to the brink of ruin, either in consequence of domestic tragedies, or through the perfidy of Alexander VI. and Cæsar Borgia.

John della Rovere, however, had, in a good time, allied himself to the heroic house of Montefeltro, who, for more than two centuries, had ruled with unrivalled splendour at Urbino. He had married the daughter and heiress of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, the last of that name, and acquired just claims to his throne. John died before Julian was raised to the chair of St. Peter, in 1503. But Julius II. did not fail to support the rights of his brother's son, Francis Maria, to whom he intrusted the command of his papal forces, during his unsuccessful exertions to drive the barbarians from Italy.

On the death of Julius, Francis Maria was dispossessed of his states by Leo X., who disposed of them in favour of his nephew, Lorenzo de Medici. But the dethroned prince had previously connected himself by marriage with the house of Gonzaga, and found his refuge at Mantua, whither he carried his library, and the treasures of art collected with royal magnificence by his predecessors.

The exile of Della Rovere lasted during all the reign of Leo. This pope being dead, Francis Maria headed his partisans, and reconquered his states in four days. His court was restored to its primitive splendour during the rest of his reign, under his son, Guidobaldo, and his grandson, Francis Maria II., who ascended the throne in 1574.

It was at Urbino, in 1572, that the "Aminta" was first performed. Yet from Urbino and Mantua the restless poet stole repeatedly away, resisting the most urgent entreaties; and it was in consequence of these furtive departures that

he found himself oftentimes in a state of destitution, and was again compelled to apply to those same friends for relief.

In such a state of squalor and misery he appeared, in 1579, at the gates of Turin, where he was, as a vagrant, refused admittance. Being, however, recognised by some of his friends, he was introduced to the reigning duke, Emmanuel Philibert, a highly renowned warrior, who honoured in Torquato no less his poetical talents than his noble birth and well-known personal valour.

The house of Savoy is, perhaps, the most ancient reigning family in Europe*; but their certain traditions go no further back than the beginning of the eleventh century, when their ancestors, probably of Saxon derivation, established their sway over a barren district of the Alps, under the title of counts of Savoy. They gradually extended their dominion on the better side of the Alps, usurped the sovereignty of the vale of Aosta, of Ivrea, and Turin, and received the homage of the rival houses of Saluzzo and Montferrat, especially whilst the noble warriors of the latter family, Conrad and Baldwin, were engaged in their long career of conquest and glory in the Levant.

The house of Savoy reached a very high degree of power and wealth under Amedeus VIII., who, during his long reign, from 1398 to 1451, had reunited under his sceptre the states that had hitherto been divided between two different branches of the family, and added important conquests to his double inheritance.

* Umberto, *dalle bianche mani*, Count of Savoy, the first on record, flourished at the very opening of the eleventh century. This family, according to more recent researches, traces its descent from the Lombard feudatories, the marquises or dukes of Ivrea. Umberto died A.D. 1056. His posterity, in an unbroken line, has been constantly rising in power during the last eight centuries. It numbers thirty-eight reigning princes during twenty-six generations.

His successors were not equally fortunate: at the epoch of the first French invasion of Charles VIII., in 1494, Blanche, of Montferrat, regent of Savoy, had aided the descent of the French monarch; but her son, Charles III., was soon overwhelmed by the attacks of the invaders, both friends and enemies; and, distracted by the rebellion of the Genevese Protestants, he was, at his death, in 1533, stripped of all his dominions.

Emmanuel Philibert, his son and heir, a lackland adventurer, entered into the service of the Emperor Charles V., the principal author of his father's ruin, and who had but lately adjudged the succession of Montferrat to the rival house of Mantua. The young prince had, by dint of strenuous exertions, inured a sickly frame to the most arduous achievements. He soon became one of the emperor's best generals: he followed him to his African expeditions, and was the greatest instrument of his power during the long struggles of Flanders.

After the abdication of Charles V., in 1556, Philibert, whose states were always a prey to the French and Imperial armies, was equally the greatest of Philip II.'s generals, and won for him the decisive battle of St. Quentin, in 1557, which led to the treaty of Chateau-Cambresis.

During these famous negotiations his services were finally taken into consideration, and he was in consequence restored to the throne of his ancestors in 1559.

Since that epoch Emmanuel Philibert zealously laboured to promote the welfare of his subjects, who had been plundered and ravaged by so long a series of political calamities. Science and letters received the warmest encouragement at Turin, where the duke had established the seat of government: and Piedmont, under his administration, assumed that aspect of splendour, culture, and prosperity, which, in the sixteenth century, characterised the Italian states.

At the court of so noble a prince, Tasso could be no unwelcomed guest. But his evil genius once more dragged

the wanderer to Ferrara*. A young prince of the house of Alphonso, called the Marquis of Este, resided at Turin; he offered his mediation to reconcile the fugitive bard to his hard-hearted patron. At the epoch of Alphonso's third marriage with a princess of Mantua, Vincenzo Gonzaga equally interposed his good offices, and Tasso was once more at the feet of Alphonso.

The duke's cold reception, and the sneers of his minions, reawakened the poet's fury; he was heard uttering bitter invectives against his master's ingratitude: a few rash, incoherent words, the outburst of a momentary excitement, were construed into a deliberate insult; and his enemy seized on the first pretext afforded by his own impetuosity to silence his complaints for ever.

This accounts for Tasso's seven years' confinement in the hospital of St. Anna, better, perhaps, than the kiss that the poet, in a fit of madness, was said to have given his princess in the presence of the duke and his court—an anecdote contradicted, however, by all authors who wrote not under the immediate influence of the house of Este; and this equally accounts for the obstinacy with which Alphonso resisted the entreaties of all the princes of Italy, of the popes, Gregory XIII. and Sextus V., of the Emperor Maximilian, and even of the community of Bergamo, all suing for the release of his victim.

Tasso's confinement commenced in March 1579, and ended in 1586, when, by the intercession of Vincenzo Gonzaga, his relentless gaoler was finally induced to throw

* Tasso's frequent return to Ferrara had, however, other causes besides his alleged attachment to the Princess. Since his first sudden flight to Sorrento, Alphonso held all the poet's MSS. in his hands, and obstinately refused to restore them unless Torquato applied for them in person; and on the poet's complying with his patron's desire, the latter still withheld the MSS. under pretence that Tasso's shattered health and impaired faculties required repose, and that it was unwise to trust him with the means of further injuring his constitution.

open the door of his cell; even then Alphonso, as if dreading the presence of the man he had so cruelly offended, refused to see him, and to receive his acknowledgment of thanks.

The horrors of Tasso's confinement are beyond all power of description. But after some years of frenzy and despair, the Duchess of Urbino—his other more dangerous friend, Leonora, had died in 1581—was allowed to alleviate his miseries, and more latitude was granted to the broken-hearted recluse. But Torquato's mind had already given way; and when Gonzaga led the rescued to Mantua, the poet, now in his forty-second year, "overcome by years and misfortune," was dead even to the enjoyment of freedom. The splendour of the court of Mantua ill-suited the shattered mind of Torquato. It dazzled him as the glare of broad daylight proves offensive to eyes long accustomed to the gloom of a dungeon.

And he became a wanderer; and all the rest of his life was a weary pilgrimage, scarcely ever cheered by a ray of pleasing remembrance or hope.

His favourite residence was the house of Manso, Marquis of Villa, in Naples; the same house which was, not long afterwards, opened with equal hospitality to John Milton of England.

He yielded to the invitation of Pope Clement VIII., who wished to "honour the poetical laurel by placing it on his brow;" and removed to Rome on the tenth of November, 1594. The pope's nephews, the Cardinals Cinthio and Pietro Aldobrandini, distinguished for their literary accomplishments, and for many years previous interested in Tasso's welfare, were actively employed in the preparation of that solemn ceremony.

But death already claimed Torquato as his own.

Struck by mortal disease nearly on the eve of the day appointed for his coronation, he withdrew to the convent of St. Onophrio, and expired, April 25, 1595.

Retribution, however, was soon at hand, Tasso's vain and heartless persecutor found his bitterest enemies among the best friends of the poet. He died without issue only two years after Tasso, and carried into his tomb the execration of Italy. Don Cæsar of Este, in whom the hopes of the dying tyrant for the perpetuation of his house were centered, found himself, on his accession, at war with the pope and the Aldobrandini, who, on the ground of his illegitimacy, vindicated the rights of the Holy See to the fief of Ferrara. Lucretia, duchess of Urbino, conspired with its enemies for the destruction of her family. Driven from Ferrara more by the excommunications than by the armies of Rome, Don Cæsar withdrew to Modena, where the lustre of the house of Este was soon extinguished.

The writings of Tasso*, in prose and verse, are all equally distinguished for that profundity, dignity, and loftiness of feeling—by that dye of melancholy—by that spirit of chivalrous enthusiasm, which constituted the main feature of his character. Still, the most immediate emanation from the author's soul was the beloved work of his serene days, the "Jerusalem Delivered."

Born only ten years after the death of Ariosto, Torquato said of himself, that the fame of his predecessor allowed him no rest.

Having shown by his juvenile essay—"Il Rinaldo," that there was scarcely any height to which he might not fairly consider himself entitled to aspire, stimulated as he was by his unhappy passion, which imperiously required of him to

* Tasso's Works: "Il Rinaldo"—"La Gerusalemme Liberata"—"L' Aminta"—"Sonetti e Canzoni"—"Dialoghi"—"Il Torrismondo"—"Lettere"—"La Gerusalemme Conquistata"—"Il Mondo Creato,"—etc., etc.—First edition of "Il Rinaldo," Venice, A.D. 1562; of the "Jerusalem Delivered," 1581. Best edition, Mantua, 1584; the "Aminta," 1572; last edition of "Jerusalem Conquered," 1642; complete edition of his works, Florence, 1724.

raise himself to the level of the object of his affections, Tasso entered the lists as Ariosto's rival.

But Torquato was no man to follow in the footsteps of another. He read the "*Furioso*," and joined in the universal applause of his age; but he said, like Correggio after gazing eagerly on a painting of Raphael—"I too am a painter." He said, like Michael Angelo, when, called to the direction of the works of the Vatican, he stopped on the last hill from which he could catch a glimpse of the dome of Brunelleschi—"Better than you I cannot build; but like you I will not."

Tasso was easily made aware that the chivalrous dreams of French and Spanish chronicles were by that time utterly exhausted. He looked for a more stirring subject on the latest and greatest event of chivalrous times—an event equally belonging to chivalry, by the moral agents that determined his course, by the wonders of valour to which it gave birth; belonging to history, by the monuments engraved on the traditions of ages, by the political effects it had on the destinies of Europe—the Crusades.

Recent events had given a fresh interest to the records of the wars of Palestine. Since the last ineffectual attempt of Pius II., in 1453, no Christian prince had endeavoured to preach a holy war. But the Mussulmans, against whom the European powers, intent on their brotherly feuds, no longer thought of waging war in the east, now in their turn had begun to threaten the west. Masters of Constantinople for nearly a century, the successors of Mahomet II. rapidly proceeded in their career of conquest.

Soliman the Magnificent, having subdued Egypt and Persia, turned his arms at once against the whole of Christendom. Hungary and the mainland of Greece already acknowledged his sway; and his lieutenants were emboldened to lay siege to the Austrian metropolis. His

naval armaments in the meanwhile prevailed over the heroism of the Knights of Rhodes, and drove them from that last bulwark of Christendom. Several years later, his fleets pursued the Knights of St. John to their new stronghold of Malta; whilst Genoa had been stripped of the sovereignty of Scio, and Venice lavished in vain her best blood during two long and disastrous wars, at the end of which she was deprived of the Morea and Cyprus. Meanwhile, the pirates of Algiers and Tetuan, organised in a religious and military body, as if in emulation of the order of Malta,—not unfrequently countenanced by the Christian powers themselves, especially by Francis I. of France,—sailed over the Mediterranean with triumphant colours*.

A cry of horror and consternation arose from all the churches of Christendom.

The popes and clergy appealed to what still remained of gallantry and generosity in warlike Europe. The helpless multitude uttered bitter curses against princes who wasted their forces in deeds of fraternal bloodshed, leaving them exposed to the fury of relentless barbarians.

Hence, as is but too natural to men in adversity, they turned with fond remembrance to the days of ancient glory, when the iron-clad warriors of the cross, headed by the standard of redemption, rode to their military pilgrimage. The names of Godfrey of Bouillon, of Tancred of Apulia, of Conrad of Montferrat, of Henry Dandolo, were raised to the stars; those names, they said, the very sound of which could have power to start a Saracine mother in her sleep, to clasp her infant to her bosom in anguish and terror. They looked with sorrow and pride to the trophies

* Soliman ascended the throne, A.D. 1520; his wars with Hungary, 1522, 1526; siege of Vienna, 1529; new Hungarian wars, 1532, 1534, 1547; taking of Rhodes, 1523; siege of Malta, 1565; the Venetians driven from the islands of the Archipelago and the Morea, 1537, 1540; the Venetians driven from Cyprus, 1570, 1573; Charles V.'s successful attack on Tunis, 1535; routed at Algiers, 1541.

of standards still suspended to the walls of their cathedrals, where they had been consecrated to the God of Hosts by the victorious pilgrims of pious, chivalrous ages.

The spirit of the crusades was revived.

The rapid progress of Soliman finally determined Austria, Spain, and Italy, to draw the sword once more for their common defence. The Protestant powers of Germany, setting aside their sectarian quarrels, hastened to the rescue of Vienna. The armaments against Tunis and Algiers, carried on with various success by Charles V. in person, during the short intervals of truce that were left to him from the European wars, were, in fact, crusades. The fleets of Venice and Genoa, the galleys of the Duke of Tuscany, the inheritor of the maritime power of Florence and Pisa, engaged in unequal but constant conflicts against their common enemy.

A universal armanent of all Christians, at least of all Catholic powers, was long spoken of in Italy; and the vain and weak patron of Tasso had even been flattered with a hope of obtaining its supreme command. Finally, in 1571, when Tasso had first conceived the plan of his Jerusalem, the fleets of Spain, Sicily, and the Netherlands, led by the lieutenant of Philip II., Don Juan of Austria, an illegitimate son of Charles V., and accompanied by the Genoese and Venetian admirals, Giovanni Andrea Doria, and Barberigo, as well as by the papal admiral, Marco Antonio Colonna, and the flotillas of Savoy and Tuscany, came to a decisive combat against the combined fleets of the Mahometan powers on the waters of Lepanto, where the Mussulmans lost one hundred and fifty vessels, and forty thousand combatants.

The tidings of this great victory spread the most sanguine hopes throughout Christendom.

The most zealous Christians pointed to Constantinople and Jerusalem. Pope Pius V., who had been the first promoter of that great enterprise, set no limits to his

daring expectations. The crusade was once more to be preached all over Europe. Then did Tasso sing the crusade—then did he raise the war-cry of Clermont, “It is the will of God.”

It is given only to men of the highest genius thus to divine and body forth the spirit of their age. It is by such ways that a poet makes himself the soul of his nation, and his verses sound like the hymns of a prophet.

Together with the knights and paladins of Ariosto, Tasso abandoned, likewise, the sportive style with which their deeds had hitherto been celebrated, and which ill suited the gravity of his pious subject, and the stern, melancholy disposition of his nature; for the desultory fancies of chivalrous poetry he substituted the symmetrical forms of epic narrative.

The classical turn that studies had taken since the revival of ancient literature, made our scholars regret that Italian poetry had departed from the rules laid out by Greek and Latin genius and criticism; which, directing all means to one end, combining unity with variety, had given a poem all the unison of one of the great classical buildings,

“All musical in its immensities.”

The Divine Comedy was for them only an allegorical or metaphysical, the “Furioso” only a chivalro-romantic, but a truly epic poem was still the object of every one’s wishes, the goal to which more than one of Torquato’s predecessors had fruitlessly aspired.

The “Amadigi” of Bernardo, his father, was formerly dictated in accordance with the rules of classicism; and it was only by the advice of his friends that its author was prevailed upon to remodel it after the manner of Ariosto. The “Avarchide” of Alamanni was also a servile imitation of the Iliad. But a still greater expectation was raised by the “Italia Liberata,” a poem in blank verse by Trissino, on the wars of Belisarius and Narses, which was still more

faithfully copied from the models of antiquity, but proved still a greater failure*.

In the "Jerusalem Delivered," at last Italy had its epic poem;—a work, belonging to the ancients by its classical forms, pertaining to the moderns by its romantic subject, seemed to have secured all suffrages, and, according at least to the ideas of the age, to have reached the highest state of faultless excellence.

The "Jerusalem" of Tasso is too well known a work to require that I should dwell on its general plan, or on its multifarious beauties. Torquato is, by confession of all, the greatest of epic narrators.

He seemed seldom to aspire to the glory of original invention. The enchanted isle of Armida is only a fine reproduction of the gardens of Alcina: Clorinda reminds us of the virgin Camilla; Argante of Turnus. The ancient Italian poets seemed to lay their pride in entering into a competition with their classic masters. The nocturnal excursion of Ulysses and Diomedes to the Trojan encampment reappears under various shapes in the *Æneid*, in the *Orlando*, and the *Jerusalem*. But what novel interest that crude, primitive conception of the harper of Ionia seems to acquire at every new reproduction! By what nobler motives are Euryalus and Nisus, Cloridan and Medoro, Argante and Clorinda, led to their daring exploits! What unexplored sources of pathos Virgil, Ariosto, and Tasso added to what was originally only a wolfish, cold-blooded butchery—what fatal catastrophes have been successively attached to what was merely an unimportant episode!

It is thus that Tasso has, in more than one instance, come off conqueror in his contest with his predecessors.

* Gian Giorgio Trissino, born at Vicenza, A.D. 1478; ambassador of Leo X. to Denmark, Vienna, and Venice, 1516; legate of Clement VII. to Charles V. and to Venice, 1525; died at Venice, 1550. The "*Italia Liberata dai Goti*," printed, Rome, 1547; the "*Sophonisba*," his tragedy, first acted 1515; published 1524.

His lofty mind seemed to ennoble every thing he touched. His genius never declines. Ever worthy of himself, always consistent, always master of his subject, he surveys the progress of his work with an austere and placid serenity. His tender, sad, chivalrous character breathes through every line of the poem. His style is always equally grave and sonorous ; his verses have the perpetual flowing and rolling of the waves of an ocean at rest.

It is equally well known that his grandeur and gorgeousness of imagery and style not unfrequently degenerates into turgidness and mannerism, and his harmony and fluency have caused him to fall into languor and sameness. We shall have occasion to mention that this poet was not unjustly accused of having led the way to the extravagances of the school of Marini.

But the obstinate war he had to sustain on this account against his worthless enemies, especially the members of the newly installed academy Della Crusca—who came, as it were, to provoke the lion at the bars of his iron cage, during the sorrows of his septennial imprisonment—the long and fruitless labour to which he tasked his care-worn mind to satisfy their importune criticisms, by his remodelled poem “Jerusalem Conquered,”—must absolve him in the eyes of a sympathising posterity for a few and rare aberrations of taste, which, in that full glare of glorious beauties, only the lynx eyes of malignity could have easily detected.

The life of Tasso was like a long purgatory, from which his fame issued pure and immaculate, disarming the rigour of future criticism.

The Italian drama owed its origin to the same sources to which we are indebted for the revival of chivalro-epic poetry—the policy and munificence of the Medici and Este.

From the earliest traditions of the middle ages it appears, that those formless religious spectacles, known by

the name of *miracles*, *mysteries*, or *moralities*, were wont to be exhibited in Italy as well as in many other parts of Europe, on the public squares, before the ignorant multitude.

It is generally believed, for instance, that the first thought of his mysterious journey to the eternal regions was first suggested to Dante from one of those popular shows which took place on the banks of the Arno, at Florence, during the jubilee of 1300. In the like manner we read that Lorenzo de Medici himself wrote one of those mysteries for the entertainment of his Florentines. On the other hand it can be reasonably conjectured that the ancient extemporaneous performances of *mimi* and *histriones*, in which the Roman people delighted, had never been utterly discontinued. On the contrary, those coarse and licentious buffooneries which the Italian critics have traced back to the Oscian farces of their earliest forefathers, survived even the revival of classical comedy, and were still flourishing under the name of "*Commedie dell' Arte*," when Goldoni finally succeeded in driving them from the stage.

There is little doubt that from these specimens of the popular theatre, rude and imperfect as they may appear, men of genius could have derived the elements of a true national drama, in the same manner as the ballads and romances of untutored minstrels gave origin to the polished works of Ariosto and Tasso.

Unfortunately, it was from different sources that the Italian theatre arose.

The play-houses, vast and magnificent buildings—some of which, such as the *Teatro Farnesiano* at Parma, capable of containing twelve thousand persons, are still standing for the wonder of after ages—were first built by the Este, Medici, and Gonzaga, and their direction was given to men deeply imbued with classical ideas.

The opening of a theatre was—as it is still in Italy—

an occasion for extraordinary rejoicings. Princes and lords came from distant provinces; tournaments and dances preceded and followed the performance; and the people, dazzled by those showy spectacles, were for a long time indifferent to the real merit of the dramatic exhibition.

At first, indeed, only the plays of Plautus and Terentius appeared on the stage. They were generally recited in their original language, but successively they reappeared in dull translations; and, finally, in still duller imitations.

The first Latin dramas are said to have been performed at Rome, in the presence of Pope Sixtus IV., by the members of the academy instituted by Pomponius Lætus, though Latin tragedies had been written as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century, by Albertino Mussato, from Padua, a poet and historian of the age of Dante*. The "Orfeo" of Politiano, rather, indeed, a pastoral drama—if any thing—than a tragedy, was written in two days, and represented before the court of Mantua in 1483, a theatre being built in the greatest haste for that purpose. Three years later, a translation of the "Menechmi" of Plautus was performed by the young princes of Hercules I. of Este.

Finally, towards the year 1515, the two earliest specimens of Italian tragedy, the "Sophonisba" of Trissino, and the "Rosmunda" of Rucellai, appeared on the stage at the court of Leo X.; while the "Calandria" of Cardinal Bibbiena, and the "Cassandra" of Ariosto, though written, perhaps, several years before, were only acted in 1513: the former at Rome under the auspices of the same poet; the latter at the court of Alphonso†.

* Albertino Mussato, born at Padua; died, A.D. 1330. Works: "Historia Augusta"—"Carmina," etc. "Eccerinis" (or Ezzelino da Romano) and "Achilleis," Tragedies. First edition of his works, Venice, 1636.

† Giovanni Rucellai, a Florentine noble, born, A.D. 1475; died, 1526. The "Rosmunda" acted before Leo, at Florence, 1515. The "Api," a

The "Mandragola" of Macchiavello soon followed.

Little need be said concerning this early period of our national drama. The Roman theatre itself was little better than a translation from the Greek. Plautus and Terentius are held in greater estimation than Seneca, especially because the best models of Greek comedy have irreparably perished. The Italians, who reproduced the Latins, were thus imitators of imitators. They sought their inspiration in the productions of the dead, and the chill of death seized them.

The tragedies of Trissino and Rucellai bear not unfrequent marks of superior genius; and, as objects of literary curiosity, they deserve considerable attention;—the broad jests of the good Cardinal Bibbiena; the fertility of the inventive faculties of Ariosto; and the sarcastic humour of Macchiavello, render the perusal of their comedies still interesting; but as dramatic performances, they, and their almost innumerable rivals and followers, who, during the whole of the sixteenth century, crowded the stage with their second-hand imitations of nature, have been utterly forgotten; nor did all their works prevent Italy from being in this branch of literature widely outrun by her neighbours.

Some of those poets, however, were now made aware of the want of interest which was felt throughout those languid productions, and, faithful in this to the example the first writers had set before them, they thought that tragedy could be enlivened by a revolting exhibition of crimes and

didactic poem, first edition, 1539.—Bernardo Divizio, born at Bibbiena, 1470; instrumental to the election of Leo X.; created by him a Cardinal, 1513; died, probably poisoned by Leo, who suspected him of aspiring to the pontificate, 1520. His "Calandria," first performed at Urbino, acted at Rome, before Leo, 1513. "The Cassaria" and "I suppositi" of Ariosto, written in 1494–1495; acted at Ferrara, 1512, 1513. "La Lena," acted, 1528, etc. The "Mandragola" of Macchiavello, acted at Florence, 1512; at Rome, 1518.

atrocities, and comedy by an exuberance of ribaldries and obscenities.

Thus arose and fell the Italian drama of the sixteenth century; and the people, who grew weary of those abominable productions, substituted, for classical tragedy, the melodrama, and for comedy, the old tricks and jests of their harlequins.

One branch alone of that classical dramatic literature deserves to be excepted from the sweeping sentence which I have rather hastily passed against it—I mean the pastoral drama.

Pastoral poetry was also a derivation from Greece and Rome. Virgil and Theocritus, repeatedly revived in the Latin eclogues of Petrarch and his contemporaries, appeared at last in an Italian garb in the “Arcadia” of Sannazzaro—a poet whose fame, according to his admirers, was as near that of Virgil as his tomb, which was erected close to that of the Latin bard on Monte Posilipo.

The “Arcadia,” a pastoral romance, of mixed verse and prose, elegantly though unimpassionately written, gave origin to a vast number of pastoral and piscatorial idyls and eclogues, which must also be ranged among the dead productions of a living literature. By degrees, however, those eclogues began to assume more length and importance, and one of them, “Il Sacrificio,” by Agostino Beccari, was acted on the stage at Ferrara, in 1554.

This was the earliest specimen of a pastoral drama, unless we reckon as such the Orfeo of Politiano, a formless and immature performance, which had little or no influence on the progress of that style of writing. But the “Sacrificio” of Beccari, the “Egle” of Cinthio Giraldi, and other primitive attempts in that style, were soon lost sight of, when the “Aminta” of Tasso appeared on the same stage of Ferrara, in 1572.

Tasso, who had with unequal success exercised himself

in tragedy and comedy during the intervals of repose from his more important undertaking, brought, by this single essay of the "Aminta," the pastoral drama to its highest degree of perfection.

That there was something eminently pastoral in his genius, he had demonstrated in that sketch of rural quiet and happiness—the scene of Erminia among the shepherds of the Jordan, in the seventh canto of his Jerusalem. But the natural elevation of his thoughts bent with difficulty to the humble and *naïve* language of untutored swains; and both in his poem, and in his pastoral drama, he found it necessary to give his shepherds some accessory importance, either by tracing their lineage to the demi-gods of Arcadia, or by supposing them acquainted with the pomps and splendour of courtly life.

It would not be easy to define to what particular merit "Aminta" owed its success on the stage, and continues to form the delight of gentle readers in our days. It is not certainly owing to its dramatic interest, for it has little or no action; and that little—from want of mechanic ingenuity in the construction of ancient theatres—is made up by narrations, and almost provokingly kept out of sight of the spectators. But its peculiar charm arises from a series of tender thoughts and feelings, delicate, ingenuous, pure; it is due to an elegant and poetical, but always passionate and true language; to a softness, a languor, an irresistible voluptuousness of style.

The brilliant success of the "Aminta" procured its author a large number of imitators, but only one rival. This was Battista Guarini.

Guarini was born at Ferrara 1537. He belonged to a noble family, and was a descendant of that illustrious Guarino da Verona, whose name has been mentioned among the greatest revivers of ancient literature in the preceding century. To the distinction of literary fame to which his

talents and his early education seemed to have entitled him, he preferred the more dangerous honour of courtly employment.

He was in his early youth trusted by Duke Alphonso with honourable missions to Rome, Turin, and Venice. Finally, in 1575, when, after the desertion of Henry of Valois, the Polish throne was left vacant, Guarini was sent to Warsaw, to negotiate Alphonso's election. This embassy was attended with difficulty and danger, from which Guarini could scarcely return with life; but he was only rewarded with the displeasure of his patron, who attributed to his legate's remissness the failure of his dearest scheme.

Guarini withdrew from Ferrara, and rested for a few years in the bosom of his family, at his villa, where he brought to a close his only poetical work—"Il Pastor Fido:" ambition or want led him afterwards back to the turmoils of the court. At Ferrara, at Turin, at Florence and else where, he applied for royal patronage, but always with doubtful and precarious success; either owing to the base intrigues of Alphonso, who allowed him no peace any where, or perhaps to his own haughty and jealous temper, which set him at war not only with his friends, but with his children and his wives also, by whose rebellious misconduct he was brought broken-hearted to his grave. He died in 1612, aged seventy-five.

Guarini, on his first admission to the court of Este, was one among the friends of Torquato. But the favour that the young bard enjoyed at court, especially among the ladies of the duchess's suite, soon enlisted Guarini among his bitterest opponents.

Alphonso's sister was not the only lady rejoicing in the sweet name of Leonora. According to the chronicles of the times, there were three of that name; and, for some time, it was doubtful for which of them the homage of the timid poet was intended. The youngest and loveliest was

a lady from Parma, the Countess Sanvitale of Scandiano, whose first appearance had created a powerful sensation. Guarini ranged himself among her professed admirers, and beheld with jealousy the marks of favour that the fair one bestowed on the man, in whom he apprehended a rival. The minds of the two accomplished friends were estranged, and an interchange of poetical hostilities ensued.

But the unhappy Torquato could not long be an object of jealousy or resentment. He was soon plunged into an abyss of misery, and Guarini's enmity gave way to more generous feelings; so that when, during his rival's confinement, the verses of the "Jerusalem" were circulated in a state of adulteration and disorder, it was this noble adversary that assiduously laboured to restore the poem to its proper form, and directed the edition of 1581.

To the circumstance of this rivalry between the two poets, we owe Guarini's pastoral tragi-comedy, "*Il Pastor Fido*."

In a moment of amorous jealousy, Guarini was reminded of his being born a poet, and of the chances he had of entering into a competition with his adversary, all flushed as he was with the applause with which his "*Aminta*" had been received. He took pleasure in meeting his rival on his own ground. He reproduced the most striking situations of the drama of Tasso; and in several passages—especially in the Chorus of the *Golden Age*—he made use of the same metre, and adopted its rhymes.

The plan of the "*Pastor Fido*" is as vast and complicated, as that of the "*Aminta*" is easy and simple. The drama of Guarini is thrice the size of that of Tasso. The former has also the merit of a variety of episodes very happily blended together in one action; and it proceeds with more animation and interest.

Nothing, however, would be more difficult than to institute a fair parallel between these two dramas, so nearly akin, and yet so widely different. They have ever since

divided the suffrages of criticism. Tasso is simple even to frigidity—Guarini is fertile even to exuberance; the “Amina” is more eminently a pastoral performance—the “Pastor Fido” more essentially a dramatic production.

Instead of pronouncing our sentence on the respective merit of the two poems, let us rather give our thanks to the three Leonoras, whose romantic admirers knew how to turn to the noblest purposes even passions of the most dangerous nature

CHAPTER IV.

VITTORIA COLONNA.

Academies—Cinquecentisti—Poetesses—Vittoria Colonna—Artists—
 Michael Angelo—Leonardo—Raphael—Natural History—Medicine
 —Mathematics—Scholastic Philosophy—History and Politics—Mac-
 chiavello—Guicciardini, etc.

THAT same art of princely policy, that had succeeded in allaying the tumultuous passions of a fierce multitude by ministering to their idle propensities, was equally enabled to subdue the proud spirits of the higher classes by flattering their vanity.

The republican aristocracy of Italy, whose names alone were so far above all courtly distinctions, were gradually won over to the cause of the usurpers of their free rights, by the paltry grant of the empty titles of feudal nobility, and by the institution of idle orders of knighthood; the poets and scholars of the same age, constituting another, and a more powerful element of moral power—the aristocracy of the mind—were also seduced by a precarious show of courtly favour, and ranged themselves into a privileged class under the auspices of the prince.

Thus, what still remained lofty and generous among those few whose birth or genius raised them above the common level, was either corrupted among the luxuries of a court, or degraded among the inanities of an academy.

Indeed, the court and academy were, in many instances, and to a certain extent, one and the same body. The

Italian nobility, who, even during the preceding ages, had generally taken the lead in every branch of literature and art, now condemned to a life of inaction and vassalage, found themselves compelled to turn their attention exclusively to the acquisition of those accomplishments which alone could still secure an honourable and less dangerous distinction.

Libraries and museums of antiquity and art soon became the proudest ornaments of their palaces. The titles of founders or members of an academy were the objects of their most earnest ambition; and their ardour for similar associations was easily communicated to the chief of the state, who deemed it expedient to watch over their proceedings by granting them his patronage, and sitting among them as their president.

These literary and scientific bodies, which had first risen in the fifteenth century, when, in the eagerness of their classical pursuits, the restorers of ancient classicism had felt the necessity of mutual encouragement and co-operation, soon lost sight of their nobler objects, and degenerated from the dignity of their original institutions.

The fate of Pomponius Lætus, and his associates, to which allusion has already been made, and the dispersion of the Modenese academy in 1542, whose members were charged with heresy, and thrown into the dungeons of the Inquisition, soon made their colleagues in other places aware of the necessity of banishing every subject connected with religion and politics, from their academical transactions. The famous maxim, "*NIHIL DE PRINCIPE, PARUM DE DEO*," was the corner-stone of all academical foundations.

This spirit of pusillanimous caution, which is but too soon learned among the arts of servitude, remained ever since characteristic of every Italian association even of the most innocent nature; where it is invariably enacted among the fundamental statutes, "that no remark shall

be permitted directly or indirectly allusive to the vital topics of church and state."

The academies of the sixteenth century, the "Intro-nati" at Siena, established 1525; the "Infiammati" of Padua, incorporated 1534; the Florentine academy founded in 1540, and in later times split into many sections, until it merged into the other association ominously known under the name of "Della Crusca," and other similar societies, springing up in every town and province—were at first merely occupied with philological discussions.

The adoption of the national, or, as it was then called, "vulgar" language, was for many years the object of the warmest debates. Even as late as 1529, a distinguished orator, Romolo Amaseo, in a solemn discourse pronounced before the emperor and pope, insisted on the necessity of proscribing the Italian from literature no less than polite conversation. More lately, Sperone Speroni, a contemporary and a bitter enemy of Tasso—himself an elegant Italian writer, and author of highly reputed moral dialogues—still entertained the same illiberal opinions*.

But, as it has been said, the efforts and example of Bembo—for a time the leading genius of the age—and still more so the new models of chivalro-epic poetry of Ariosto and Tasso—made the Italians sensible of their injustice; and from that time the living language began to assert an undisputed ascendancy over the dead.

This important victory over long-established prejudice was no sooner obtained, than the very name of the national language became a subject of implacable controversies.

* Romolo Amaseo, born at Udine, A.D. 1481; died at Rome, 1552. Sperone Speroni, a Venetian noble, born at Padua, 1500; a friend of Pius IV. and of his nephew, Carlo Borromeo, 1560; a courtier of Alphonso II. of Este, 1564; died, 1588. Best edition of his works, Venice, 1740.

Notwithstanding the sentence pronounced by that great father of the language—Dante himself, more than two centuries before—that the Italian was not the peculiar idiom of any town or province, but the result of all the dialects of the peninsula, chosen by the judicious taste of polished writers—yet the academicians of the sixteenth and following centuries could never agree on any of the appellations of Italian, Tuscan, or Florentine language, till, in 1612, the Florentine academicians seemed to have appropriated it to themselves, by calling their lexicon—that Atlantean work, which had cost them more than fifty years' labour—"Dictionary of the Academy Della Crusca."

The idolatry of those academics for Petrarch was coeval with the revival of Italian literature. Many of those learned associations were instituted for the sole object of studying and commenting on the verses of that favourite poet. No one could be admitted as a member of the Florentine academy who had not written two volumes at least in illustration of one of his sonnets.

But the imitators of Petrarch were even more numerous than his expounders. Crescimbeni counts no less than six hundred and sixty-one Petrarchists of note during the course of the sixteenth century.

Of all these, however, little or nothing need be said. Genius cannot abide in academies. It stands alone, like the eagle; it shuns assimilation and contact; it feels crowded and fettered within the precincts of an academy; it scorns the narrow-minded pedantry that generally presides over them; it dreads the ridicule that is generally attached to the puerilities inseparable from similar institutions. Academies are essentially the refuge of mediocrity.

There can be no doubt that the academical spirit of that age, as it powerfully contributed to the diffusion, so

did it also bring about the enslavement and degradation of literature. It gave rise to a vast number of languid, shallow, effeminate productions, of which barren imitation was the chief merit; it gave elegance, terseness, and harmony of style, an unbounded ascendancy over originality of thought and manliness of feeling; it reproduced the same ideas with an elaborate, artificial verbosity; it exhausted the sources of imagination, froze and withered the heart.

Italy had long been blind to the real merit of those *Cinquecentisti*—by which name are distinguished the imitators or rather parodists of Petrarch in verse, and the writers of the school of Bembo in prose. Their works have been held up in the schools as the unique models of writing. But the Italians of the present age have completely recovered from the idolatrous infatuation of their forefathers. Indeed, as it always happens in moments of sudden reaction, the proscription of the writers of the sixteenth century has been rather hasty and indiscriminate. They proceeded in accordance with the impetuosity of their own Alfieri, who threw from his window the *Galateo* of Monsignor della Casa, startled by that long and unmeaning *Conciossiacosaché*, at the opening of the first period.

And yet it would be injustice to deny some of those poets and orators their tribute of praise. The canzone of Bembo on the death of his brother, a few of Casa's sonnets, and of Celio Magno's religious odes: the patriotic verses of Luigi Alamanni, and other occasional poems dictated under the influence of true inspiration; a few pages of the "Cortegiano" of Baldassar Castiglione, and of the dialogues of Sperone Speroni, have been and must be preserved from the universal wreck of that exploded literature. Many of their sonnets and songs are far from being deprived of an intrinsic merit; many bear evident

marks of original genius, though written by men who seemed to pride themselves in their utter abnegation of originality*.

It has been judiciously remarked, that if any of the verses of those Canzonieri should come to the hands of a very remote posterity, and after the dispersion of the rest of that numberless phalanx of versifiers, they would probably be looked upon with the same feelings of admiration that the few fragments of Greek amatory poetry excite amongst us.

But a book, however good in itself, cannot sail to immortality without standing, in some measure, alone: it must be buoyed up either by the merit of novelty, or by its usefulness or appropriateness of purpose. The literature of the Cinquecentisti had none of these aids to bear it through the tempests of time: and, after an ephemeral and illusory course, it was irretrievably destined to sink.

The fame of the high character of some of those writers, and of the influence they exercised on the vicissitudes of a stormy age, is likely to excite a sufficient interest even after the utter demolition of those literary

* Giovanni della Casa, born at Florence, A.D. 1503; apostolical secretary, 1538; archbishop of Benevento, 1544; orator of Paul III. to Venice, 1544; orator of Charles V., 1550; secretary to Paul IV., 1555; died, 1556. Works: "*Il Galateo*"—"Degli Uffizi"—Rime—Lettere—Orazioni, etc. "*Latina Monumenta*." Best edition of his works, Venice, 1752.—Baldassar Castiglione, a Mantuan noble, born, 1478; a courtier of Guidobaldo, duke of Urbino; his ambassador to Henry VII., in London; to Louis XII., in Milan; created Count of Novellara by Francis Maria della Rovere, 1513; his ambassador to Leo X., 1513 to 1520; invited to the court of Mantua, 1522; ambassador of Clement VII. to Charles V., 1524; a favourite with the emperor; criminated by Clement as privy to the disasters of Rome, in 1527; died of sorrow at this imputation, 1529. A noble warrior, no less than an accomplished scholar. First edition of "*Il Cortegiano*," Venice, Aldus, 1528.—Celio Magno, a Venetian noble, and secretary to the republic; born, 1536; died, 1602. His famous song, "*Deus*," printed, Venice, 1597.

monuments on which they trusted to have grounded their titles to imperishable renown. Raised by their talents to the highest dignities of the church, honoured with the friendship and confidence of aspiring princes, the amiable, refined, but often unprincipled literati of that century, could boast of having brought to perfection the arts of courtly flattery and servility—far different in practice from the beau-ideal of a courtier's character that Castiglione has abstractedly and theoretically given in his *Cortegiano*. The writers of the age of Leo X. could boast of having outdone in this the golden age of Augustus, which they so fondly strove to reproduce.

Even the plain and unambitious Ariosto, no less than the high-minded Torquato, were not entirely exempt from blame; and if we are induced to deal more leniently towards them, and endeavour to forget the meanness with which they prostituted their superhuman gifts to minister to the vanity of worthless patrons, it is only because they received the requital they fully deserved, and atoned for their abjection by a whole life of disappointment and misery.

To this proneness of the generality of the men of letters of the sixteenth century to unbidden acts of servitude, they added, by way of contrast, an enthusiastic but retrospective fondness for the name of their country; not indeed of the trodden and plundered land that lay bleeding at their feet, but of that classic hero's dust which reminded them, at every step, of ages of greatness and victory which could never return.

Confused and humbled by the complication of the unforeseen and unavoidable calamities of Italy; witnesses of the fast-waning splendour of its artificial civilisation; and harassed by the pressing foreboding of the final extinction of its nationality, they dwelt with fondness and pride upon the memories of the past. They affected an utter contempt for all that was modern. The language of the

country, its literature, its mediæval art, its morals and manners, its very religion, all was by them forced back to the age of Virgil and Cicero. The glories of ancient Rome were the last citadel in which they intrenched themselves against the prevailing fortune of their barbarous invaders.

Few, however, and rare, were the patriots that had sufficient leisure to give their country more than a fugitive thought. They were all overpowered and carried away by that whirlwind of passion and sin that characterised social life in the sixteenth century. Epicurean sensuality and fashionable scepticism pervaded all ranks. The court and clergy set the first example of unbridled licentiousness; it spread like a contagion to the lowest orders; it gave its tone to letters and art.

Lukewarm and passive in the cause of their country, though deeply engaged in politics and diplomacy; indifferent even to infidelity in matters of religion, though officially obliged to fight the battles of popery and the Inquisition, the poets and scholars of the age of Leo X., of Clement VII., and Paul III., were only eager in their pursuit of pleasure.

They never suffered even their ambitious views to interfere with their amorous propensities. Cardinal Bembo would never consent to part with his fair Morosina, though that dangerous connection exposed him to the displeasure of his patron, Leo X., and was, perhaps, the only obstacle on his way to the papal throne. Bishop Della Casa owed it to a few lascivious poems, if he lost his chances of obtaining a cardinal's hat; for the sake of which, however, he did not hesitate to make himself a minister of the Holy Office during his legation to Venice, and carried his interested zeal so far as to drive from Italy Paul Vergerio, bishop of Friuli, one of the noblest champions of religious freedom. Molza renounced the sweets of domestic life, forfeited his paternal inheritance, incurred frequent per-

sonal dangers to run after other people's wives, and ended, by an ignominious death, an existence which he had wasted in the extravagances of a fickle and wanton gallantry*.

The indulgence in every kind of illicit intercourse was never visited by the censure of public opinion, so far, at least, as it was carried on in a manner consistent with good taste and refinement. Men of talent, especially poets and artists, seemed to avail themselves, in real life, of that unbounded latitude that Horace had liberally allowed them in their works of imagination :—

. . . . "Pictoribus atque poetis
Quidlibet audendi semper fuit æqua potestas."

Raphael pined away in his studio for the absence of his Fornarina, and his condescending pontifical patron sent for her, lest the sorrow of the love-sick painter should interfere with the progress of his works.

The epoch of the greatest triumph of letters and arts, that golden age when popes called round their shrines such men as Bembo and Sadoletto, Contarini, Flaminio, and the accomplished, though inconstant and insincere Englishman, the Cardinal Pole—the age of Leo and Clement—was also that of the utmost depravation of morals.

It gained ground with an alarming progress, especially in Rome, down to the close of the pontificate of Paul III., when the salutary check of the Reformation began to recall the reluctant prelates to a necessary sense of their duty.

Learning and genius, more than wisdom and honesty, presided over the council of the Vatican; nor could it have been in the power of any man to resist the tendency of a

* Francesco Maria Molza, a Modenese nobleman, born, A.D. 1489; died, 1544. Works: Rime, Novelle—"La Ninfa Tiberina"—"Ritratto-di Giulia Gonzaga," etc. Best edition, Bergamo, 1747.

perverted age. Adrian VI., who, with more zeal than discernment, thought he could banish vice from his court by dismissing the secretaries of his predecessor, and the poets and scholars that constituted its ornament, only gained the reputation of a barbarian; and after his death the indignant Romans crowned his physician as the deliverer of their country.

The corrupting poison had penetrated the most vital parts of society. It was the age when so vile a being as Pietro Aretino could boast of the favours of the greatest monarchs and of his intimacy with the noblest geniuses, when he could with impunity attack the most unspotted reputation, aim the shafts of his malignity against Vittoria Colonna, and, with a rare impudence, upbraid Michael Angelo for the nakedness of the figures of his *Last Judgment**.

As it invariably happens in dissolute ages, woman, in the sixteenth century, had fallen into the utmost degree of moral degradation. In imitation of the ages of Pericles

* Pietro Aretino, called the "divine," and the scourge of princes, born, A.D. 1492; attracted to the courts of Leo X. and Clement VII., 1517; banished from Rome for misdemeanour, 1524; a favourite with Giovanni de Medici, the famous condottiere, and Francis I. of France, 1524, 1525; returned to Rome, 1526; in love with a kitchen-maid, and stabbed by one of his rivals; returned to John de Medici; this warrior died in his arms, 1526; a favourite with Gritti, doge of Venice, 1527; received a gold necklace and an offer of knighthood from Charles V., 1530; received a necklace from Francis I., 1533; received a pension from Charles V., 1536; lived with the Emperor in the greatest intimacy; applied to Paul III. for a cardinal's hat, 1534; knighted and presented with 1000 crowns by Julius III., 1550; embraced and kissed by that pope in presence of his court, 1553; a friend of Titian; his comical adventure with Tintoretto, 1544; presented with 300 gold crowns by Henry VIII.; belaboured and wounded for his impudence, by the agents of the Earl of Arundel, English ambassador at Venice, 1547; died of a fit of laughter on hearing the infamies of his sisters, 1559. Works: "*Sonetti Lussuriosi*,"—"Capitoli Satirici,"—"Commedie,"—"Ragionamenti," etc., chiefly printed in Venice during his lifetime.

and Augustus, the Rome of Leo X. had raised a throne, almost an altar to prostitution.

Tullia d'Aragona, a syren, who, to the charms of a truly Roman beauty, added the advantages of a very high, though illegitimate birth, and uncommon accomplishments; an unrivalled singer; and one of the greatest female poets of her age, like one of the ancient courtesans, could boast of having mustered in the ranks of her admirers the proudest spirits of her age. The illustrious and short-lived Cardinal Hippolito de Medici; the Florentine patriot Filippo Strozzi; Varchi, the historian; Bernardo Tasso, and other poets without number, all acknowledged her supreme, and oftentimes capricious and tyrannical rule*.

She divided her glory with another renowned beauty, Imperia Cortisana Romana, "worthy of so great a title," as it was said in her epitaph—a lady of talent and taste who received the homages of Sadoletto, among others, and obtained such titles to immortality as it was in the power of his verses to bestow.

Her daughter—whom the fond courtesan had raised up to a life of honour and modesty—found herself, after her death, exposed to the unwelcome attentions of Cardinal Petrucci, the same who shortly afterwards perished in his attempt against the life of Leo X.; and so arduous was it then for unprotected virtue to find shelter against enterprising libertinism, that, unable otherwise to free herself from the prelate's importunities, she destroyed herself by poison.

But the sixteenth century was an age of contrast, exhibiting at once, and bringing into contact, the opposite extremes, as if to show that, however Providence may suffer evil to prevail, it is never without enabling us to discern and to loathe it, by putting it to the test of luminous

* "*Rime di Tullia d'Aragona e di diversi a Lei.*" Venice, A.D. 1547-60.

examples of good. The age of Tullia d'Aragona—nay, the very age of that infamy of her sex, Lucretia Borgia, could boast of the greatest model of feminine perfection—Vittoria Colonna.

Vittoria was the daughter of Fabrizio Colonna, one of the last heroes of warlike Italy; and who, together with Prospero and other members of his family, followed the standards of Charles V., and revived the lustre of the name of his house, which, under Alexander VI., had been utterly eclipsed. Her mother was Anna di Montefeltro, a princess of the proud house of Urbino. She was born in 1490.

At the age of four, Vittoria was betrothed to Ferdinand d'Avalos, marquis of Pescara, one of the best generals of Charles V. Engaged in the disastrous wars of that age, Pescara lived only at rare and short intervals with his marchioness, who had established her residence in the Isle of Ischia. He was taken prisoner at Ravenna, in 1512, and dangerously, and, as it proved, mortally wounded at Pavia, in 1525.

Francis I., of France, it will be remembered, was completely routed, and taken prisoner, in that momentous encounter, and all Italy lay at the mercy of his fortunate rival. It was only by that sudden event that the Italian politicians felt the utter helplessness of their situation. Unable openly to enter the field against the Austrian conqueror, already master of Naples and Sicily, no less than of Spain, Flanders, and Germany, they had recourse to a conspiracy—that last expedient, which had proved so often inefficient and fatal.

The throne of Milan was occupied by the last heir of Ludovico Sforza il Moro—of him who had expiated his unnatural treason against his country, by a perpetual captivity in France. Ludovico had left two sons, Maximilian and Francis Maria, who were both successively invested with

the precarious sovereignty of Milan. The eldest had been compelled to resign in favour of Francis after the battle of Marignano. His youngest brother had been raised to the throne under the patronage of Charles V., in 1521, but was, in fact, placed at the discretion of his imperial lieutenants.

Girolamo Morone, chancellor of the duke, a man of consummate experience in the affairs of state, beheld with resentment the indignities endured by his sovereign and country from the insolence and rapacity of Germans and Spaniards. He conceived the generous plan of ridding Italy at once of the presence of her foreign dominators. Pope Clement VII., and the other Italian courts, lent a willing ear to his daring, yet plausible suggestions. Louisa of Savoy, regent of France, during her son's captivity, acceded to the negotiation. England and Switzerland promised their aid and subsidies.

Pescara was, at that time, generalissimo of the armies of Charles V. in Italy. He was an Italian by birth, though issued from a Spanish family, established at Naples for two generations; but he affected Spanish habits and feelings, and prided himself in his Spanish descent. The conspirators laid the strongest temptations before him to win him to their cause. They offered him the independent sovereignty of Naples, which was then placed under his military rule.

Pescara entered into the designs of the league. He gained a full insight of their secret manœuvres, and enabled himself, by a double treason, either to secure their victory against the emperor, or to deliver them to his vengeance.

The conduct of France determined his choice. Aware that Louisa of Savoy was ready to sacrifice to her own the interests of Italy, he threw off the mask and betrayed his accomplices.

Vittoria Colonna was then residing at her castle in Ischia,

and received only vague and few reports of her husband's conduct. It is more than probable that she never had but a very indistinct idea of those disgraceful transactions. She seemed to consider her interference in political matters as an act of unfeminine presumption. Only apprehending lest her husband's ambition might seduce him from the path of duty, she warned him by letters against the dangers that would, in those troublous times, beset his career, and conjured him to listen only to the dictates of his conscience and honour.

Had she been acquainted with the full extent of his double dealing and perfidy, issued as he was from a family that had espoused the interests of Charles V., and attached to her husband by the warmest affection—she would have joined in the universal execration that accompanied Pescara to his grave, into which he descended a few months after the consummation of his treason, in consequence of his wounds.

Left alone in her castle, still in the flower of her age, the Marchioness of Pescara consecrated her life to mourn over the loss of her unworthy consort. She established herself successively at Naples, Rome, and Viterbo, whence she repaired to a convent in Orvieto, and was there visited with a reverence akin to religion by the most distinguished personages. Among her intimates were Bernardino Ochino, Carnesecchi, and other followers of the reformed doctrines,—a circumstance that led many to suppose in her some inclination towards their religious opinions.

Her time was divided between the exercises of Christian duties and the cultivation of poetry.

A taste for this noble art prevailed in that century among the ladies belonging to the noblest houses in Italy. The historians number no less than fifty female poets, who left in their works sufficient claims to the admiration of posterity. Among the most renowned were Veronica da Gambara, like Vittoria, a pattern of conjugal faith and de-

votion *—and the tender and ill-fated Gaspara Stampa, the Sappho of Italy, who was believed to have died of ill-requited love, until, in our days, Hallam has partly broken the charm for three centuries attached to the romance of her life †.

But above these, and above all, the name of Vittoria Colonna has been placed by the unanimous consent of her age ‡.

Her canzone to the memory of her husband, and several of her religious poems, are among the most valuable productions of the Cinquecentisti. The earnestness and intensity of her sorrow—the sincerity of her devotion, breathe from every line of her truly inspired strains; and the impression we receive from them is the more powerful, as we compare it with the vapid and affected effusions of her contemporaries.

Among the friends of that greatest of Italian poetesses, there was one, whose loftiness of genius and character equally gave him the highest claims to her unbounded consideration; one who was alone worthy of her—Michael Angelo.

The friendly intercourse between those two noble and pure beings, and the interchange of poetical declarations of their warmest sympathy, I dare not, and yet I know not by what other name to call it but—love.

It was nothing indeed like the ardent passion that alternately raises us so far above, and plunges us so much below our human nature; for a heart like Vittoria's could only feel that passion once, and Michael Angelo's never;

* Veronica da Gambara, born, A.D. 1485; married to Giberto da Correggio, 1509; widowed, 1518; visited in her retreat by Charles V., 1531; died, 1550. Her works printed, Brescia, 1759.

† Gaspara Stampa, born, A.D. 1524; died of love, 1554. Her poems printed, Venice, 1554.

‡ First edition of Vittoria Colonna's poems, Parma, A.D. 1538; "Rime della Diya Vittoria Colonna di Pescara," Venice, 1544.

neither was it any thing like that cold and hypocritical idolatry that the imitators of Petrarch mistook for Platonism; it was the union of two kindred souls, who needed each other's encouragement to bear through the disenchantments of life, and looked to each other as living personifications of that ideal virtue, on which, notwithstanding the corruptive influence of the age, they persisted in placing their unshaken belief.

It is reported of Michael Angelo, that he stood by the death-bed of that rare woman, in Rome; that he kissed the cold hand which she held out to him, and was heard afterwards to regret—"that the awe of that solemn moment had deterred him from equally kissing her forehead and face."

Vittoria Colonna died 1547.

It is well known that the painter of the Last Judgment, the sculptor of Moses, and architect of St. Peter, was likewise a poet. Dante, forgotten by the effeminate academicians of the sixteenth century, had still a throne in the stern and manly heart of the independent artist. The Divine Comedy was his inseparable companion. He treasured up in his mind the lofty images of the Ghibeline poet, and gave them life in the works of his pencil and chisel.

His few verses, which he seemed to write in a careless haste, are all of a lofty and sublime cast; his style has something of that bold and terrible manner, and bears the marks of that sovereign will, before which the hardest materials bent in obedience. Michael Angelo in verse, and Macchiavello in prose, are, perhaps, the most powerful masters of style in Italy between Dante and Alfieri.

Upon the margins of his favourite copy of the Divine Comedy, Michael Angelo had pencilled illustrations nearly to every verse of the poem. The two kindred geniuses had met there in their loftiest conceptions. Long after the artist's death, that book, being conveyed from Rome to

Leghorn by the grand duke's order, was lost in a shipwreck. Can there be a greater treasure buried in the bosom of the deep?

That versatility and universality of genius, by which Michael Angelo was enabled to excel in every branch of art, was not exclusively peculiar to him. On the contrary, we find among the earliest artists that same encyclopædical taste that prevailed among the lovers of science and literature.

Few men ever deserved a higher seat in the temple of immortality than Leo Battista Alberti, who was among the most eminent friends of Piero and Lorenzo de Medici. Besides his success as a painter, sculptor, architect, and musician, and the very able works he wrote on all the fine arts; besides his merits as a poet and classical scholar, he was deeply versed in several branches of philosophy; and we are indebted to him for the discovery of the Camera Optica, which preceded by nearly a century the Camera Obscura, the invention of another equally vast, though more eccentric genius, Giambattista della Porta*.

But the fame to which Alberti was so amply entitled, was eclipsed by a man, who, like him, aspired to invade every region in the realms of the mind, with a success equal to his daring—Leonardo da Vinci.

Leonardo seemed, towards the close of his life, to have become indifferent to the glory he had won by his works of art and by his writings, which had laid the foundation of the theory of art†—all-absorbed as he was in his scientific researches. Charged by the Duke of Milan with the direction of those hydraulic works by which the agri-

* Leon Battista Alberti, born towards A.D. 1400; died, 1472. His greatest work: "*De re Ædificatoria*," Florence, 1485.—Giambattista Porta, born at Naples, 1540; died, 1615. His famous work: "*Magia Naturalis*," best edition, 1589.

† The famous treatise on the Art of Painting, by Leonardo, first printed, Paris, A.D. 1651.

culture of the Lombard plain stands, perhaps, even in our days, unrivalled in Europe, Leonardo made himself equal to his task by plunging deeply into the mathematical and physical sciences, and by comparing the results of his own experience with what he found among the records of antiquity. The canal of the Mortesana, above two hundred miles in length, carried across the arduous mountain passes of the Valtellina, and the territory of Chiavenna, to conduct the waters of the Adda to the gates of Milan, was achieved by Leonardo contemporaneously with his "Last Supper."

After his removal to France in 1515, his ardour for the natural sciences, which had already considerably interfered with his success as an artist, at Florence and Rome, seemed to engross all his attention. The copious fragments of his manuscripts still lying inedited in the Parisian libraries would be sufficient, if published, to operate a revolution in our ideas concerning the history of modern discovery.

There seems to be scarcely any among the great results to which Galileo, Kepler, and Copernicus were led long after him, which was not, though imperfectly, and, as it were, only instinctively, anticipated by Leonardo*.

The talents of the last of that great triumvirate of art—Raphael—were not less extensive than those of Vinci and Buonarotti; though the laborious task which was set to him by his patrons did not allow the continuator of the "Loggie" of Bramante to give sufficient time to sculpture and architecture, in which he otherwise equally excelled.

Born under the unfavourable circumstances of inferior rank and penury, Raphael was easily induced to court, or compelled to abide the favour of, the great. Upright and pure as he was in his principles, and blameless in his conduct, we would, however, look in vain to him for that

* A short account of the inedited works of Da Vinci was given by Venturi, an Italian resident in Paris, A.D. 1797.

proud and even stubborn self-respect which characterised Leonardo and Michael Angelo, and which was, perhaps, in them the result of their republican descent.

Raphael was the first painter-courtier.

Brought into contact with the imperious and irascible Julius II., and the peevish Leo X., he knew how to win the good-will of both. Disinterested and unambitious to a degree that is rarely found among the suitors of glory, he loved art for its own sake, and worked with equal earnestness and industry for his wealthy friend, Agostino Ghigi, as he did at the Vatican. His apparent subserviency to the caprices of his great patrons, is rather attributable to an almost feminine desire of pleasing and obliging, than to any dread he stood in of them, or to any selfish expectation of honours and rewards.

An inmate of the court of Rome during nearly all his lifetime, Raphael lived and died rather as the friend than the servant of the popes. He was the Petrarch, as Michael Angelo was the Dante of art.

Still, his example soon became contagious among the artists of that and the following ages, and proved in the end fatal to the independence and dignity of art, even as the undiscerning benevolence of Petrarch had a baneful influence on the true interests of literature. Genius began henceforth to be valued in proportion as it was rewarded and applauded at court; and a notion prevailed, which is not utterly exploded even in our days, ascribing the state of decline and sterility into which the fine arts have fallen to the cessation of that patronage that fostered them during the palmy reigns of Julius and Leo;—as if those popes had themselves created art, whereas, as we have said, they only inherited it together with that last breath of Italian liberty which had called into action the energies of a naturally imaginative people, and which came faint and exhausted to expire in their arms.

Had it not been for Julius or Leo, it is doubtful indeed

whether the Sixtine chapel had ever been painted, or the dome of St. Peter's been raised to the sky; but Raphael would have always been Raphael, even if, like Correggio, he had never been brought into contact with the models of antiquity; if he had never crossed the threshold of a lordly palace, and had ended, like him, by dying of a pleurisy occasioned by the fatigues of his pedestrian journey home, loaded with the vile coppers with which the canons of the cathedral of Parma had remunerated his master-piece.

The death of Leonardo and Raphael, which took place in the same year, 1520, was the close of the supreme period of arts. The rest of Michael Angelo's life, who survived his two rivals for nearly forty-four years, was chiefly spent in bringing into light the manifold conceptions to which he had already given life in his teeming brain. As he had beheld and mainly contributed to the success of the Roman and Florentine schools, so did he witness the diffusion of art throughout the other provinces of Italy, and the gradual rise of those Lombard, Venetian, and Neapolitan schools, which Titian, Correggio, Guido, and the Caracci, were soon to raise to the level of his own archetypal genius*.

To follow the fine arts in their further progress enters not into the plan of this work. As I shall not therefore have frequent opportunities to revert to the subject, I shall not dismiss it without giving a few words to the famous goldsmith, sculptor, and engraver—to the restless libertine and adventurer, Benvenuto Cellini.

Owing to recent translations by men of eminent genius, and to new editions of the original, in Italy and abroad,

* Antonio Allegri da Correggio, born, A.D. 1496; died, 1534.—Titiano Vecellio di Cadore, 1477-1576.—Ludovico Caracci, of Bologna, 1553-1619.—Agostino Caracci, 1557-1602.—Annibale Caracci, 1560-1609.—Guido Reni, of Bologna, 1573-1642.

the life of Benvenuto has been daily acquiring a new interest in the eyes of the world. Independent of the importance attached to such a work as a manual of the history of art, that autobiography is also invaluable for the fair insight it gives of the stirring drama of life that was acting under his eyes.

From the lowest to the highest ranks; from the *osterie* of the Trastevere and Mercato Nuovo, to the Pitti and Vatican palaces, Cellini describes and portrays with an easy, unconscious ingenuousness. The proudest characters, the loftiest geniuses among his contemporaries, are introduced as his familiars, stripped of their robes of state, of all the *prestige* of their fame, such as heroes are said to appear before their valets.

Cellini is the Gil Blas of the sixteenth century.

Whilst dictating in his rude provincial idiom to one of his apprentices in his workshop at Florence the memoirs of his life, Cellini assumes the grave and earnest tone of one who feels he is narrating the exploits of a hero. The riots and scuffles, in which he was desperately fond of engaging, dealing as freely with his knife as he did with his chisel; his amours, his revels, dangers, and hair-breadth escapes, are told with an air of bravado and humour, by which his very deeds of murder and libertinism seem rather to call forth our mirth than our censure.

But the work suddenly assumes the importance of an historical narrative, when Cellini represents himself as appointed by Pope Clement VII. to the direction of the artillery of the castle of St. Angelo, to which the pontiff repaired for safety during the ever memorable siege of Rome by the constable of Bourbon, in 1527.

Were we to credit the writer's own words, the falconet that struck the French renegade from his scaling ladder in the first heat of the assault, and felled him dead at the foot of the battered wall, was levelled and fired by Cellini him-

self. He was equally successful in wounding and disabling the Prince of Orange, who assumed the command of the besieging army after the constable's fall.

The horrors of that disaster were no sooner over, than Cellini was thrown into the dungeons of that very castle he had so valiantly defended, under a false charge of having, during the tumults of the siege, robbed the Vatican of the crown jewels. The bold adventurer broke through the bars of his dungeon, and scaled the castle walls. In this last attempt he fell from a dangerous height, and was, all maimed and bruised, led back to his chains.

The interference of Francis I. of France prevailed at last over the injustice and ingratitude of Clement. Cellini crossed the Alps, and, having settled at Fontainebleau, he basked for some time in the sunshine of royal favour. But driven from court by the frowns of the king's favourite, the Duchesse d'Estampes, he wandered for a few years from town to town, till he definitively settled at Florence. He died in 1570, aged seventy*.

That spirit of classical inquiry which characterised the intellectual tendency of the ages of Cosmo and Lorenzo de Medici, had made the Italian scholars fully acquainted with the results to which the natural and mathematical sciences had been brought by the philosophers of antiquity.

The elements of modern science were therefore essentially founded on translations and commentaries on classical works. Pliny, Aristotle, and Dioscorides, awakened a universal curiosity for natural history. Hippocrates and Galen operated an equal revolution in the medical sciences, which had but too long obeyed the influence of Arabian empiricism. To the translations of Euclid we are indebted for the revival of mathematics.

The first feeling of those grateful scholars, when brought into contact with the transcendent genius of Greece and

* "The Life of Cellini," first published, Naples, A.D. 1730.

Rome, was unbounded, passive veneration. For a long lapse of years they were lost in awe and wonderment, and thought, like Alexander, that their fathers had conquered all the realms of nature, and left nothing undone.

But a state of inactive and stationary contemplation is incompatible with the natural aspirations of the human mind. By degrees a vague desire was engendered of putting the soundness of ancient theories to the test of immediate experiment; and it was not always possible to reconcile authority with irrefragable fact. Hence the yoke of superstition was gradually shaken; salutary doubt arose, and inquiry redoubled.

The wonders of the remote climates of the far East, and of the newly discovered Western continent, had meanwhile laid open before them amazing truths. Columbus and Vasco de Gama had, at one stroke, overthrown the old geological and geographical edifices. The botanic gardens recently planted in several Italian universities were fragrant with the perfumes of a thousand exotics, unknown to antiquity. The acute observations of Cesalpino, and the gigantic labours of Aldrovandi, had been proportionate to that sudden widening of the kingdom of creation. Before the close of the sixteenth century, few of the mysteries of nature were left unveiled. All that remained for posterity was the work of classification and system*.

Equally important discoveries attended the researches of the learned on the most admirable of organised beings. A professor at Bologna, by name Mondino, had, towards the beginning of the fourteenth century, first attempted to emancipate anatomy from the tyranny of the pious superstition of paganism and early Christianity. But, two centuries

* Andrea Cesalpino, the precursor of Harvey in the theory of the circulation of the blood, died, A.D. 1603.—Ulysses Aldrovandi, of Bologna, a great scientific traveller, and collector of minerals, plants, &c., born at Bologna, 1522; ran through his fortune in his pursuit after science, and died in an hospital, 1605.

later, the importance of Mondino's discoveries were superseded by the results of the researches of Vesalius, a native of Brussels, but for many years a professor at Padua—and by those of his more illustrious Italian pupils, Falloppio and Eustachio*.

So it was that medicine obtained its most important results in Italy; some of the physicians of that country, especially Cesalpino, Acquapendente, and even Fra Paolo Sarpi, laying, as it is well known, no slight claims to the honour of having either plainly alluded to, or very nearly accomplished, that wonderful discovery, of which an Englishman gave the definitive demonstration—the circulation of the blood†.

The progress of mathematics was effected under analogous circumstances.

At the epoch of the storming of Brescia by the French in 1512, among the defenceless crowd that fled before the fury of an exasperated soldiery, there was a houseless, nameless boy, the son of destitute parents, who, almost mortally wounded in that affray, had, with his widowed mother, taken shelter in the cathedral of the town, and there sank bleeding and lifeless in her arms. That boy recovered from his wounds, but not from a severe cut in his mouth which left him a stammerer for life, and won him from his contemporaries a name which has since become immortal—that of the restorer of mathematics, Tartaglia.

To him the science of algebra was indebted for the solution of cubic equations. He laid the foundation of modern military engineering by his theory on the flight and path

* Gabriel Falloppio, born at Modena; professor at Pisa and Padua; died, A.D. 1563. "*Observationes Anatomicae*."—Bartolommeo Eustachio, flourished at Rome, died, 1570.

† Fabricio d'Acquapendente, born, A.D. 1537; professor at Padua, 1565; died, 1619. "*De Venorum Ostioliis*," Padua, 1603—"Opera omnia," Leipsic, 1687.

of cannon balls and shells ; and, together with two of his successors, gave his countrymen considerable titles to the glory of inventors of modern tactics and military architecture, of which they were afterwards partly defrauded by the unscrupulous rivalry of the French*.

Cardan, his contemporary, and, for some time, his adversary, did not contribute less than Tartaglia to the progress of mathematics, though not, perhaps, endowed with an equally profound and energetic mind ; but the reputation that he simultaneously acquired as an unrivalled physician, an independent philosopher, and universal scholar ; his wild, vain, ungovernable disposition, so nearly bordering on sheer insanity ; the honours and offers he received from the most distant courts of Europe ; the extent of his works ; the more than romantic adventures of his life, of which he himself gave a most curious narrative ; the very errors and superstitions to which he blindly abandoned himself—render him an object of far greater interest than other perhaps more eminent or more useful geniuses.

To sum up all his extravagances in one characteristic trait, be it sufficient to state, on the authority of two contemporary historians, that he starved himself in order to fulfil his own prediction of his death.

It was by the works of these mathematicians and their contemporaries, that astronomy was freed from the trammels of astrological speculations, and grounded on the sure basis of mathematical laws. It was in consequence of the light that they spread throughout Europe, that the Coper-

* Niccolò Tartaglia, born, Brescia, A.D. 1506 ; died at Venice, 1557 ; translations of Euclid and Archimedes, Venice, 1543. Original works : "Quesiti et Inventioni Diverse," Venice, 1546. "Nova Scientia Inventa," Venice, 1534. "Trattato di Numeri e di Misure," Venice, 1556-1560. —Girolando Cardano, born, Pavia, 1501 ; died, 1576, at Rome. His works : "De Methodo Medendi," &c., Venice, 1531. "Ars Magna," "De Vita Propria," &c., &c. Complete edition, 10 vols., folio, Lyons, 1663.

nican system—which had been only timidly and hypothetically announced by its illustrious inventor, in 1543, and by him dedicated to his holiness Paul III., as if with the hope of propitiating that authority, from which he apprehended the most serious hostilities—found its most determined supporters in Italy.

Guided by their theories, and aided by two other eminent astronomers, Gregory XIII. was enabled to proceed to his reform of the calendar in 1582. To them, in short, is due the glory of having levelled the path on which modern philosophy was soon to tread with gigantic strides. Tartaglia was the precursor of Galileo.

Galileo Galilei was born at Pisa in 1564, and appointed professor of mathematics in that university in 1589. Before 1592 he had made his first experiments on the fall of bodies. Still his main discoveries do not, strictly speaking, belong to the sixteenth century.

Born at the close of that age of wonders, only two days after Michael Angelo's death, and when the other great luminaries, Ariosto, Macchiavello, and Tartaglia, had long since disappeared—rising alone like the spring star of Arcturus, shining with its solitary ray on the east, while the cluster of the winter stars, Procyon, Orion, and Sirius, are setting in the west—Galileo is the first of another era; he stands at the head of another set of illustrious men, who were, once more, and for the last time, to assert for their country the boast of supremacy of genius.

The investigation of the laws of nature, however powerfully efficient in breaking the bonds of ancient authority; however, in the end, attended with entire success, was, nevertheless, considerably retarded, and, to some extent, counteracted by the tyranny of the different systems of scholastic philosophy.

The Platonic academy, opened at Florence by Cosmo de Medici, and which, as we have seen, had partly shaken that old edifice of error and prejudice, called, in the middle

ages, Aristotelian philosophy, had been broken up at the epoch of the first expulsion of the Medici, in 1495. Its members had rallied after the return of that family in 1512, but were soon afterwards implicated in a conspiracy against Cardinal Julio de Medici, and by him utterly and violently dispersed.

The downfall of the academy brought with it, as a necessary consequence, the triumph of the Peripatetic school.

In consequence of the greater proficiency of the scholars of the sixteenth century in the Greek language, they were now enabled to resort to the original works of their great master; and the doctrines of the Stagyrice, more directly drawn from their legitimate sources, once more assumed their wonted ascendancy in the schools.

But the learned of that age were no longer men to submit with blind deference to the dictates of any master, alive or dead. Facts, glaring facts, were daily brought into light by recent discoveries, against which, ancient authority could but indifferently stand its ground. Aristotle could no longer be the God Terminus of science.

The efforts of his advocates were, consequently, directed to reconcile his exploded dogma to the irresistible results of experimental knowledge. Instead of obstinately resisting the intellectual movement of the age, by the dead weight of his doctrines, they endeavoured, by a stretch of the sense, by a time-serving interpretation of his words, to bring him up to the level of their age:—as the mountain would not go to Mahomet, they felt Mahomet must go to the mountain.

This last effort of Peripatetic philosophy—this attempt to force Aristotle to say what he never dreamt of, had split his disciples into different factions, according as they either rigidly worshipped the Greek idol himself, or, hoping to find a more yielding ground, they bowed to the altars of his commentator, Averrhoes.

There were catholic and heretic Aristotelians.

Whilst these two parties fought their battles with all the inveteracy of sectarian fury, the scattered fragments of the Platonic school inveighed against both of them with equal virulence; nor could they be brought to any reconciliation by the efforts of some of their good-natured contemporaries, who having, as they thought, fathomed the most recondite depths of knowledge, and thoroughly studied the merit of the arguments of each party, came to the conclusion that they were all equally right or equally wrong; and that they wrangled, and quarrelled, and tore each other to pieces to no good purpose whatever.

In the midst of this deplorable waste of mental faculties, Bernardino Telesio, a daring spirit, was finally enabled to impugn all authorities, and laid the basis of a new independent school of philosophy, in which reason was eventually to vindicate its unlimited ascendancy over authority. The opinions of Telesio, objects, as they were, of the animadversions of the church, found warm partisans among the bravest spirits of his age. The versatile mind of the hot-headed Cardan; the deep, though cloudy genius of the ill-fated Giordano Bruno; and in later times Tommaso Campanella and Galileo, exultingly stood forth for the cause of intellectual emancipation. The influence of Telesio's theories was felt in the Italian schools for a long lapse of years, and equally presided over the construction of the philosophical systems of Gassendi and Des Cartes in France, of Hobbes and Locke in England*.

But in the exultation of their happy enfranchisement,

* Bernardino Telesio, born at Cosenza, A.D. 1509; died, 1588. "*De Rerum Natura*," Rome, 1565. Miscellaneous works, Venice, 1590.—Giordano Bruno, born at Nola, towards 1550; banished from Naples by the Catholics, 1580; banished by the Calvinists from Geneva, 1582; obliged to quit Paris, 1584; banished from Wurtemberg by the Lutherans, 1586; persecuted at Frankfort for religious opinions, 1590; apprehended at Padua, and tried at Venice, 1592; burnt alive at Rome, 1600. Works: "*De l' Infinito, Universo et Mondi*"—" *De Umbris Idearum*"—" *Spaccio della Bestia Trionfante*," &c., &c. Frankfort, 1590.

in the consciousness of their mental forces, and the intoxication of success, many of those philosophers, it must be avowed, fell into the extremes of mad presumption, and transcendent audacity. Their theories on the system of the universe, on the nature of the Deity and the human soul, were not unfrequently written in open defiance of all revelation, no less than of other less sacred authorities; and it can no longer be a matter of surprise to hear, that hardly any of them, whatever the standard under which they ranged themselves, escaped the charge of deism, pantheism, and even of open infidelity and materialism.

The maze of sophisms and subtleties in which all of them involved themselves, in their dull and obscure writings, afforded but too ample means of proving any thing against them.

The churches, especially that of Rome, resorted to violent means to silence their disputes in blood; and the intolerance and illiberality with which the different parties denounced each other before their common enemy most deplorably aided the work of persecution. The bulls of excommunication, and the Index, were soon found inefficient to quell their rebellious spirits, and the Inquisition resorted to its odious instruments of torture and death.

An illustrious physician, Severi, was beheaded and thrown into the flames of Modena. Barozzi, a mathematician, expired among the torments of a trial for which age and infirmity unfitted his exhausted frame. The mild and modest Telesio struggled against Rome all his lifetime, and was brought by chagrin to an untimely grave. Finally, Giordano Bruno, to whom no rest was granted, after having been equally expelled from all religious communions, fell into the hands of the Inquisition at Venice, was sent over to Rome, and there burnt at the stake.

We must deplore the means resorted to by the church to bring those ill-advised philosophers back to the creed of their country; but we cannot deny that some of them set

no limits to their freedom of inquiry ; that often their doctrines, were it not for their egregious absurdity, might have proved dangerous and fatal ; and that they, in some instances, provoked the rigour of the most lenient and reluctant authorities, by a rash, uncalled-for defiance, not unlike those religious enthusiasts whose wanton obstinacy and importunity frustrated the forbearance of their pagan and Mahometan rulers.

The follies and extravagances of those founders of Italian philosophy extended their pernicious influence to the remotest posterity. They left us an inheritance of doubt and presumption, which, rather crushed than checked by the rigid discipline of our Italian schools, made us not unfrequently cherish error with all the secret fondness of forbidden enjoyment. A spirit of opposition, naturally called forth by the Roman Index, the censorship, the thousand shackles by which thought is trammelled in Italy, pervaded the daring youth of the universities, many of whom seemed to court the fame of a free-thinker, and *esprit fort*, as the most enviable distinction, and who associated the notions of cold scepticism and infidelity with the most generous feelings of patriotism.

The political sciences and philosophical history, of which Macchiavello had laid the first elements, began to engage the attention of his contemporaries. It has already been mentioned above, that the Lombard and Tuscan republics, ever since their happiest days of freedom and conquest, had charged the worthiest and most active citizens with the compilation of national annals. Italy was almost by birthright the land of history. The memories of past ages were written in indelible characters on the monuments of the country. Every ploughman had a tale to tell of the field he tilled. The plains of Lombardy were heaving with mounds covering the remains of all nations.

For a long lapse of years, Italy had been to Europe,

what Europe was afterwards to become to the rest of the world—an organised body of highly civilised states, different in their origin, laws, and constitutions; divided by local jealousies and opposite interests; constantly engaged in their endeavours to establish a political equilibrium by the manœuvres of a wary and even unprincipled diplomacy; baffled oftentimes in their ambitious schemes, and brought into sudden collision, but still deriving new energies from their very rivalry, and promoting, with their own, the interests of social progress.

Of this primeval political system which was, in later times, to preside over the destinies of nations, the Italians early gave theoretic no less than practical essays. As they had been the first among whom true social life was fully developed, so they were also the first to write. The age of writers closely followed in that country the age of heroes; rather, I should say, that the same men were both heroes and writers.

Nothing, in fact, can be perused with a deeper interest than the often ignorant but always conscientious chronicles of republican Italy; such as the writings of Malaspini, Dino Compagni, and the three Villani at Florence; Albertino Mussato at Padua, and Andrea Dandolo at Venice*. They are generally dictated in disorder and hurry, as if the hand that wrote them was still trembling with the excitement of public life; as if the writer regretted the few moments he consecrated to register the annals of the past, in his anxiety to take his share of the present, or to provide for the future. The sentence they passed on the events

* Ricordano Malaspini, died, A.D. 1281; his "History of Florence," published, Florence, 1568.—Dino Compagni's "Chronicle" extends from 1280 to 1312.—Giovanni Villani's "History of Florence," from its origin to 1348; first edition, Venice, 1537. Matteo, his brother, and Filippo, his brother's son, continued it to 1364.—Andrea Dandolo, born, 1307; Doge of Venice, 1343; died, 1354. His History published by Muratori.

which they witnessed—the opinions they transmitted relative to the character of their contemporaries, are uttered in a tone of deep, almost disdainful conviction, as if they were placed too far above suspicion to deign to support their assertion by the accumulation of evidence; or to dream of the possibility of their statements being ever questioned by the inquisitiveness of after generations.

But now that Italy had become a prey to domestic and foreign usurpations, and, the scene of active life being transferred elsewhere, she was left to exercise her dominion over the realms of the mind, historical studies were pursued under the more favourable circumstances of a calm, meditative age; and, associated with politics, they gave rise to that science which was afterwards called by the name of philosophical history.

The historians of the sixteenth century, however, who wrote when religious and civil tyranny had declared its unrelenting war against thought, were soon made aware, that a writer espousing the cause of honour and truth must unite to the powers of genius the heart of a hero and the devotedness of a martyr.

Some of them were indeed equal to their dangerous task. Whatever their moral characters, or the political bias by which they were actuated, whilst engaged in the debates of public life, such an air of conscientiousness and candour, of calm and dignity, prevails in every page of their writings, as might well give us a more favourable impression of the integrity and morality of their age, than their own descriptions are calculated to suggest.

But the insidious liberality of princely patronage not unfrequently enlisted the writer in the cause of despotism, and the republican annalist was turned into a court historiographer. The prevailing taste for classical literature gave elegance of style and purity of language an ascendancy over the merit of historical veracity; and that gravity,

earnestness, and forbearance, which enchants us in Villani or Dandolo, loses much of its attraction when coming from such bitter partisans as Guicciardini and Nardi, or from such notorious sycophants as Pigna or Giovio.

It is especially as an historian that Macchiavello calls forth our sincere admiration. Macchiavello, the stern misanthrope, the warm patriot, writing with a hand still bruised and benumbed by the rack to which the vengeance of Medici had doomed him—never betrays, by the slightest allusion in his Florentine history, any bitterness of resentment. Wholly engrossed by the importance of his subject; exhibiting all that versatility in abstracting and generalising ideas, and that sagacious estimate of human nature, by which his discourses on Livy, his life of Castruccio, and his other political works, are distinguished, he shows himself all over the work an apostle of freedom and virtue. Ay, virtue! notwithstanding that tinge of inborn misanthropy, which a long dealing with men, and struggling with evil, had exasperated and deepened.

His friend, the prince of Italian historians, Guicciardini, is not so utterly exempt from blame. In his youth an ambassador of the Florentine republic; afterwards a stanch partisan of the destroyers of Florentine liberty; a warrior and lieutenant of the papal forces at Parma and Modena, under Leo X. and Clement VII.; an orator of the tyrant Alexander de Medici, before Charles V., at Naples; and the main instrument of the exaltation of his successor, Cosmo I.;—Guicciardini, a shrewd politician, a heartless patrician, detested by the people, deluded by the ungrateful tyrant to whom he had given up his country—while relating events in which he had a large share, in the solitude of his retirement, is always warmly attached to the name of Medici. Still it would be injustice to say that party spirit or disappointment draws him out of the dignity befitting his important ministry; and whenever the interests of his

patrons are not immediately at stake, he shows himself a zealous and fearless lover of truth*.

Likewise Adriani, Nerli and Nardi, Segni and Varchi, and Scipione Ammirato†, either impenitent republicans, dying in the distress of sorrows of exile, or awkward courtiers, preferring the cause of truth to the favour of their lord; sometimes stabbed and mangled by his satellites; sometimes persecuted even in their tombs by his jealousy, that succeeded in mutilating, and even altogether withdrawing their writings, in some instances defrauding posterity for centuries—all of them may be said to excel in that self-possession which, divesting the related events of all exaggeration or palliative, presents them bare, but striking evidences, against the monsters whom they consign to the unerring desecration of posterity.

The Florentine historians have been held in high reputation in consequence of their merit of terseness and elegance of style, and purity of language; though, with the exception of the concise, sententious, ever-powerful Macchiavello, they all wrote with that redundance, diffuseness, and pompousness, that characterised the prose writers of the sixteenth century, and which they fondly mistook for eloquence.

But every other town and province of Italy could boast of an equal number of eminent annalists.

Navagero, Bembo, and others, were charged with the care of the history of Venice; while Paruta and Contarini undertook, by able political treatises, to reveal the secret working of the constitution of a state, of which the wisdom and valour, the internal security and prosperity, were, in

* Francesco Guicciardini, born, A.D. 1482; ambassador to the Spanish Court at Bruges, 1512; governor of Modena and Reggio, for Pope Leo X., 1518; governor of Romagna, 1531; died, 1540.

† Adriani, John Baptist, born at Florence, A.D. 1513; secretary of the republic; died, 1579.—Jacopo Nardi, born, 1476; imprisoned and exiled; died, 1555.—Scipione Ammirato, 1531–1601.

that age, the objects of the admiration and envy of the civilised world.

Genoa had its annalists, Bonfadio and Foglietta. Ludovico il Moro had, before 1500, selected Corio, a Milanese noble, as the historiographer of his country; whilst Pigna performed equal duties under the patronage of the house of Este. Costanzo, an elegant poet, was busy with his work on Naples; and the grave events which, towards the close of the sixteenth century, had brought the church of Rome to the brink of ruin, engaged the attention of several writers, the precursors of the two historians of the Council of Trent—Sarpi and Pallavicino*.

But the annals of their country were either not sufficient, or too dolorous a subject for the Italians, to be exclusively dwelt upon; and those especially, whom political misfortunes, or spirit of adventure, had driven abroad, illustrated the lands they visited by their historical productions. Hence those works on France by Emili; on Spain by Mari-neo; on England by Polidoro Vergilio; and others on more remote countries, who thus opened the field in which Davila and Bentivoglio were soon to be highly distinguished.

Cardinal Bentivoglio†, a man of high feelings, though a papal legate, writing an account of the great struggle of the Hollanders for their religious and political emancipation; describing places he had visited, and events he had witnessed; treading on the battle-field where his brother and nephew had been slain. Davila‡, the son of a creature of Catherine de Medici; a courtier; an adventurer, but also

* Sforza Pallavicino, born at Rome, A.D. 1647; a cardinal, 1657; died, 1667. "*Storia del Concilio di Trento.*" Rome, 1656.

† Guido Bentivoglio, of Bologna, A.D. 1579–1641.

‡ Arrigo Caterino Davila, born, A.D. 1576; in the French service, 1594; in the Venetian service, 1599; governor of Dalmatia, Friuli, and Candia; murdered near Verona, in a popular affray, 1631. "*Storia delle Guerre Civili di Francia.*" 1559–98.

an intrepid soldier; giving a full account of the feuds of the Huguenots and the wars of the League—both shrewd, cool, and diligent observers, as well as warm and eloquent narrators, seemed providentially intended to perform, as it were, the part of arbitrators in a contest in which the interested parties, on either side, were too much blinded by partiality or rancour to be allowed to plead their own causes before the tribunal of after generations.

But, from its primordial rise, history found itself environed by the frowns and threats of prevailing tyranny, and was put to the disheartening ordeal of fire and sword.

Varchi, who, after a long exile, was recalled by the Duke Cosmo de Medici, and invited to write events he had witnessed, doing homage to none but truth—one dark night, as he returned from court, where, according to his wont, he had read a chapter of his history to his patron, was assailed, and all but mortally wounded, by an unknown assassin. Bonfadio was, by the malignity of powerful enemies, brought to the scaffold, accused of the most heinous crimes. Sarpi, who relied too far on the protection of his native republic, Venice, whose interests he daringly sustained against the pretensions of the court of Rome, well-nigh fell a victim to papal revenge. In full daytime, in the midst of his friends, in a thronged street, he was attacked by four ruffians, whose poniards made acquaintance with the best of his blood*.

Both Varchi and Sarpi recovered from their wounds; but their example, and the fate of other votaries of truth, proved fatal to its cause. The strongest spirits began to waver; and, after a short struggle, despair prevailed, and the silence of death.

Such was the sixteenth century—the age of genius—the

* Paolo Sarpi, born, Venice, A.D. 1552; a servile monk, 1566; died, 1623. "*Istoria del Concilio Tridentino.*" London, 1619. Under the anagrammatic name of Pietro Soave Polano.

age of crime!—that sealed the fate of Italy, that gave its utmost development to its powerful mind—the sunset of Italian greatness—the dawn of European civilisation.

It would be difficult to point out another age or country in which the human mind displayed so high a degree of activity; in which so many immortal names were crowded together in so short a space of years. Truly, of all that exuberance of mental vigour, a vast deal was miserably wasted in vain and illusory pursuits: of those scientific and literary labours an immense part is irretrievably lost to posterity.

But was any other age—are our own times, quite free from similar aberrations from the rules of sense and taste? Are our phrenology and animal magnetism less deplorable extravagances than the chimerical systems of the pseudo-Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy of bygone centuries?

God suffers us to grope in a chaos of darkness and error, as if to make us aware that He alone is truth; and that in Him alone our longings after truth may be expected to find a lasting repose!

FOURTH PERIOD.—FOREIGN DOMINION.

CHAPTER I.

GALILEO.

Decline and Extinction of Italian Reigning Families—Spanish Oppression — Religious Intolerance—Pirates—Banditti—Tommaso Campanella—Masaniello—Attempts against Venice and Genoa—Papal Government — Italian Heroes abroad, Farnese, Spinola, Strozzi—Marini and the Seicentisti—Chiabrera—Christina of Sweden—Guidi—Filicaia—Faustina Maratti—Sarpi—Galileo and his School—Cassini.

THE crowning of Charles V. at Bologna, in 1530, was for Italy the commencement of a new era. That ceremony took place under circumstances ominously unexampled. It was the revival of a spectacle that had not been witnessed in Italy since nearly a century. The golden and iron crowns, reproduced after long oblivion, seemed on the Austrian's head to sparkle with renovated lustre. None of his predecessors, not excepting even Charlemagne, or Otho the Great, had ever held Italy so firmly and unconditionally in his grasp.

Of all those Italian princes that were lost among the crowd of his imperial retinue at Bologna, there was scarcely any one that had not been his enemy, and yet not one that owed not his estates and his very existence to the emperor's clemency. That same proud pontiff, Clement VII.,

who laid the diadem on his brow, had been for nine months a prisoner at St. Angelo, utterly, helplessly at his mercy. There was not one among the proudest heads in Italy, that Charles could not, at his pleasure, make a footstool to his throne.

From the first descent of Charles VIII. of France, to the treaties of Bologna, during the space of thirty-six years, the Italian states had in vain attempted to make a stand against the current of foreign invasion. The valour of their combatants, and the wisdom of their politicians, their leagues, intrigues, and conspiracies, had been equally baffled. Their active but discordant endeavours, far from preventing, had only hastened the course of fate.

At Bologna they surrendered at discretion. War had indeed soon broken out afresh between the two irreconcilable rivals of France and Austria. It was continued even after the death of Francis I. and the abdication of Charles V., by their respective successors, Henry II. and Philip II., down to the peace of Chateau Cambresis, in 1559. But since 1530 no Italian standard was raised, no mention ever made of the name of Italy. That country was still, for that and the following ages, often the field and prize of combat; but, as a nation, it had long since ceased to have any share in the events that decided its doom. A long period of passivity had begun, during which Italy seemed to have entered into a new struggle with her rulers to prove whether their means of oppression or her power of endurance would be sooner exhausted.

For all the rest of the sixteenth and during part of the following century, a period of comparative peace ensued—interrupted only by ephemeral fits of petty ambition on the part of the Italian princes, who were as yet rather forced than schooled to their yoke.

It was not long, however, before their submission was thoroughly accomplished. Unable to throw it off, they endeavoured to appear proud of their state of dependence.

They adopted, even to affectation, the manners and style, and the language itself, of foreign courts; they entered into their political views, proffered their services and subsidies, in order to secure their favour; they purchased from them the sanction of their titles; they courted their alliance by frequent intermarriages, to extend their influence abroad, and strengthen their despotism at home.

Deprived of all intrinsic importance, they strove to outshine each other by their courtly splendour, to the utter exhaustion of their finances; they turned their last remnants of power into an instrument of usurpation; they extinguished the last spirit of republican activity by the lavish gift of aristocratic distinctions; they dried up the sources of the wealth of the country, and prepared their own with the ruin of their people.

The consciousness of the rapid decline of their power, of their progressive annihilation and imbecility, exasperated and perverted their nature, and called forth their most wicked propensities. Always prone to abandon themselves to opposite extremes, enervated by habitual indolence, and yet haunted by the vague longings of a vain-glorious ambition; harassed by the testimony of a troubled conscience; jealous, suspicious, restless; now they buried themselves among the headlong excesses of a riotous debauchery—now they sued for peace with Heaven by an outward show of bigoted devotion, by a servile submission to the church, by a ready cooperation with its work of fanaticism and persecution.

Such were the great majority of our national princes in days of foreign bondage; who have rendered the very name of royalty for ever execrable in Italy, by associating it with the memory of the most awful enormities that ever degraded the human race.

Thus, with the exception of the house of Savoy, to which the advantage of its geographical situation, and the valour and policy of its princes, added every day fresh importance,

the Italian reigning families had, long before the close of the sixteenth century, utterly fallen from their former political influence: the most illustrious of them, after a silent and often ignominious obscurity, as if exhausted with long indulgence in a dissolute life, died of sheer impotence, and became extinct for want of succession.

By the peace of Cambray in 1529, and that of Chateau-Cambresis in 1559, the absolute possession of Italy was adjudged to the Austrian house of Spain. It descended without serious opposition from the Emperor Charles V. to Philip II., and from him to his heirs, Philip III. and IV., and Charles II., whose reigns embraced nearly the whole of the seventeenth century.

During that long interval of deathlike tranquillity, the chains that conquest had forged were fastened and riveted. Italy lay under the control of Spain lifeless and mute.

Of all foreign rules with which the wrath of Heaven might have visited that ill-fated country, that of Spain was the most afflictive and cruel. Philip II. and Paul IV. ascended the throne at nearly the same epoch; and, though their indomitable pride brought them into frequent collision, they felt but too soon the necessity of mutual cooperation in the sanguinary war that both waged against civil and religious freedom.

The spirit of catholic intolerance was communicated to Italy by the Spaniards. To the bigoted zeal of that nation, which had been roused and fostered during the last Moorish wars, the Italians are indebted for the institution of the Holy Office and Jesuitism. The gloomy genius of Loyola rekindled a religious ardour which a long period of half pagan refinement had well-nigh extinguished. At the head of a band of Spanish maniacs, in whom he had infused the zeal and intrepidity of ancient chivalrous spirit, the sainted visionary hurried along the Italian cities, waving the torch of fanaticism. He offered to the reluctant Paul III. his devoted legion. That priestly militia

invaded the schools and colleges, the pulpit and confessional; they usurped the monopoly of the mind, from its earliest development to its last struggles in death. The Jesuits were first installed by the Spanish viceroys in Naples and Sicily, and by the Spanish duchess of Cosmo I., at Florence.

The zeal of the most rigid popes could not satisfy the rapid ferocity of Spain. The ministers of Philip II. were seriously bent on the dethronement of Sixtus V., because that pontiff seemed inclined to receive the recanting Henry of Navarre into the bosom of the church!

Terror and violence equally presided over the civil administration of the lieutenants of Spain. Naples and Milan were exhausted by harassing tributes. The two Sicilies, deprived of their constitutional franchises, rapidly sank from that state of prosperity to which they had been raised by the liberal house of Aragon. The example of Spanish pride, pomp and indolence, engendered among the Castilian nobles by the exorbitant affluence of wealth from their transatlantic colonies, became contagious among the Italian aristocracy. The privileges granted to, or usurped by, the nobility and clergy; the arrogance and misrule of the military; the general disorganisation of all social orders, had put an end to the empire of the law. The Italian nobles, satisfied with the share they were allowed to take in the oppression of the people, surrounded with an extravagant *cortège* of bravos, protected by the inviolability of their persons and dwellings, were sure of unbounded impunity. Society was once more submitted to the right of the strongest. The horrors of the Middle Ages had recommenced in Italy. The annals of the seventeenth century are filled with the details of private feuds, murders, and vengeance—of daring iniquities perpetrated in open defiance of public authority.

But the Spanish government, like all other despotisms, was no less improvident in protecting its Italian subjects

from foreign aggression, than it was unable to secure for them the enjoyment of social order. Whilst the galleons of the "Invincible Armada" were routed in the Scheldt or the Channel, the roving pirates of the neighbouring ports of Barbary spread terror and desolation all along our coasts. The bagnios of Algiers and Tunis were crowded with thousands of Italian captives. The terrified labourer was startled from his sleep by the glare of his burning cottage; the shores of Calabria and Sicily were turned into a swampy desert by nearly a century of unrelenting warfare.

Meanwhile, swarms of deserters and bandits—the outcasts of a society that afforded the weak no protection, the wronged no redress—wreaked their vengeance on such of its members as fell defenceless into their hands. The Italian brigands, joined in formidable bands of hundreds and thousands; headed sometimes by the young scions of a bankrupt nobility; less feared than admired and favoured by the poor inhabitants of the mountainous districts to whom they proved inoffensive neighbours; secure in their numbers, in their strongholds, in their reckless, desperate bravery, were, for nearly two centuries, the terror of the Roman and Neapolitan governments, against which their wars were principally waged.

The day had even been, when those lawless bandits nearly proved the instruments of national emancipation. A wide-spread conspiracy had been entered into, towards the year 1599, by a great number of Calabrian monks, who enlisted men of the most desperate character, with a view to deliver southern Italy from the Spanish yoke, by a general massacre. At the head of this association—which relied on the cooperation of a Turkish fleet—was a Dominican friar, equally known as a rebellious spirit in the republic of letters—Tommaso Campanella.

He was one of those vast, mighty, and yet partly diseased geniuses, endowed by Providence with a degree of

energy which would seem redundant and dangerous in more peaceful and enlightened ages, but which could alone have made them equal to the mission of strife and peril for which they were intended. Campanella was one of the boldest champions of Telesian philosophy—one of the staunchest supporters of the Copernican system. With a mind that could not rest satisfied with the most luminous results of science, he launched into the boundless space of mystical inquiry. To a profound erudition, and an acute and versatile understanding, he added an inextinguishable thirst for what was then called forbidden knowledge, and made himself an adept in the arcana of astrology and magic. Like many of his predecessors, he was accused of entertaining hostile opinions, not only against the doctrines of the Church, but against Christianity itself. He was known among his enemies by the appellation of Cardan's ape.

Involved in the calamities of the Calabrian conspiracy, he underwent the most severe ordeal that the ingenuity of the Spanish torture could contrive. Finally, after six-and-twenty years of severe confinement, released by the intercession of Pope Urban VIII., he repaired to his court, whence—the prisons of the Roman Inquisition being not a sufficiently safe harbour against Spanish vengeance—he again removed to Paris. He died in a convent of that city, honoured and cherished by Louis XIII. and Richelieu*.

Humbled and crushed by the rigorous measures of the combative pope, Sixtus V., from 1585 to 1590, the Italian bandits returned to the charge with redoubled forces under his pusillanimous successors. The wide waste that lies between Rome and Naples continued to be the theatre of

* Tommaso Campanella, born at Stilo, A.D. 1568; a Dominican, 1582; arrested and tortured at Naples, 1599; liberated, 1626; left Rome for France, 1634; died in Paris, 1639.

their inroads, until their final extermination by the lieutenants of Napoleon.

There are now no more Italian bandits. The love of the marvellous, so common among foreign tourists, may still, perhaps, dignify a gang of paltry beggars or sneaking footpads into a legion of high-bred brigands. But the few robbers which are now occasionally to be met with on the Italian highways are no more to be compared to the spirited Knights of St. Nicholas, who once ranged themselves under the standard of Alphonso Piccolomini or Marco Sciarra, than the jackal of the marshes to the wolf of the Apennines.

The race of the Italian bandits is extinct. The few remnants of those bold and generous freebooters that had escaped the ravages of their French destroyers, either fell into the snares of papal perfidy, and were summarily immolated, or were gradually tamed and subdued by the long continuance of peace. The population of the Apennines, thinned by war, penury, and emigration, seemed to share in that state of languor and apathy that characterises the lowest classes all over the country. They are still at war with their governments; they still consider contraband and brigandage as a lawful means of reprisals against duties and taxes, about the imposition of which they were never consulted; they pride themselves in their evasion, or even open violation of vexatious laws, which no social compact ever sanctioned; they consider themselves entitled to protest and rebel against a government which they were never called to acknowledge; and, when sufficiently strong, they avail themselves of their right to declare war against it, against its abettors and dependents, against all that rely on its protection. But they seldom act in accordance with these rather wide notions of right and wrong. The governments of the present day are careful not to urge them to the last extremities. The yoke is never made to weigh hard upon them. The

Apennines are still the abode of a wild independence; and the veteran of the highway has hung his blunderbuss over the mantel-piece, and rests, like an old campaigner, under the shade of his laurels, astonishing and edifying the rising generation by the recital of his former exploits.

Were it otherwise—were the armed bands of the Apennines once more to pour down on the plain, the sympathies of the uneducated classes would be still in their favour. The subjects of absolute governments view such deeds of violence under a different aspect. Their hatred against their rulers admits of no discrimination. Whoever dares to throw his gauntlet to the established authorities, be it even the smuggler of the mountains or the bandit of the woods, is sure to be their natural friend. Whoever breaks through the trammels of their odious laws is with them a hero; if he is hung in the attempt, a martyr.

But it was not only among the lawless rovers of the Apennines that the Spanish government met with obstinate opposition. The Milanese and Neapolitan insurrections, by which Charles V. and Philip II. were, as we have mentioned, baffled in their attempts to establish the Spanish Inquisition in 1547 and 1563, were not the last occurrences of popular reaction against the all-powerful oppression of their successors. The unwarlike population of Naples and Palermo, roused by unbearable depredations to the courage of despair, led by the stormy eloquence of untutored demagogues, arose *en masse* against the avaricious ministers of Philip IV. The revolutions of Masaniello at Naples, and Giuseppe Alessi at Palermo, in 1647, and another at Messina, thirty years later, seemed to announce the downfall of the Spanish dominion in Italy.

The fleets and squadrons sent against the revolted cities were repeatedly routed, and the monarch's lieutenants condescended to negotiate with the rebels.

The times, meanwhile, seemed highly favourable to the vindication of popular rights. The Netherlands were just

reaping the first fruits of their dearly asserted independence. England was constituted into a free commonwealth, and Charles I., confined at Hampton Court, was awaiting his doom. Every where in Germany religious dissensions led the way to political enfranchisement.

Unfortunately the upper classes in Italy did not, as in the north, espouse the popular cause. The multitude—abandoned to themselves, cajoled by the artful viceroys, deceived by their leaders, betrayed also by France, whose policy it already was to foment or allay Italian discontent, according as it suited its views—after an immense waste of blood, were finally brought back to their allegiance.

Whilst the largest Italian provinces were thus perishing under the immediate oppression of Spain, and the smaller states were compelled to follow its policy, the Republics of Venice and Genoa were kept in a state of constant apprehension from its designing ambition.

Already, in 1548, and again in 1571, the Spanish fleets of Charles V. and Philip II. had repeatedly threatened Genoa, thus requiting the signal services of Andrea Doria to the house of Austria by the demolition of those free institutions by which that patriotic hero had secured the prosperity of his country.

Foiled in their attempts against Genoa, either by the watchfulness of the senate or by the interference of Rome, the Spanish viceroys turned their endeavours against Venice. The ample possessions of that maritime state on the mainland, and its thriving commerce in the East, were looked upon with rancour and jealousy. The Venetians had also given offence by their alliance with the Protestants of Holland and Germany. They had been the first to acknowledge Henry IV. of France, and to negotiate his reconciliation with the Roman see. Political interests and religious fanaticism equally contributed to render that state an object of the aversion of Spain.

The Dukes of Ossuna and Toledo, viceroys of Philip

III. at Milan and Naples, resolved to rid their provinces of the dangerous vicinity of an independent republic. Their accomplice, the Marquis Bedmar—the Spanish ambassador at Venice, hired a band of foreign cut-throats, who were to facilitate the invasion of the Spaniards by the massacre of the doge and senate, and by the conflagration of the city.

The final day had risen for Venice. But the vile instruments to whom that deed of iniquity was committed could be satisfied with nothing less than a double treason. The senate, put on its guard by a timely warning, only delayed its vengeance till it was enabled to obtain it full and mature*.

But the frequent recurrence of Turkish hostilities, the ruinous wars of the Morea and Candia†, in which, after its wonted prodigies of valour, the lion of St. Mark was, in the end, obliged to give way before the prevailing fortune of the crescent, allowed Venice no leisure to fight out its quarrels with Spain. It was then, that, threatened in the very heart of its empire by powers who did not scruple to add such deeds of perfidy to their widely superior forces, the Venetian government was compelled to intrench itself behind that screen of terror and mystery—to seek its safety in that system of suspicion and espionage—of secret, sudden, appalling executions, which have wrapped in gloom the sunset of Venice. The senate felt that they were treading on the brink of a yawning abyss; they were governed by terror, and they ruled by terror.

Of all Italian potentates Rome alone could still be considered independent of Spain. The papal government had already felt the utter helplessness of its political and

* Conspiracy of the Marquis of Bedmar against Venice; Jacques Pierre, Jaffier, and one hundred and sixty conspirators, executed, A.D. 1618.

† War of Candia, A.D. 1645-1669. Conquest of the Morea by the Venetians, 1682-1699. The Venetians driven from the Morea, 1714-1718.

military situation during the sack of Rome by the lieutenants of Charles V. in 1527. But the successors of Clement VII. had found a powerful advocate in the bigotry of Philip II., and of the fanatic nation over whose destinies that monarch presided.

Even when the Duke of Alva, with the greatest reluctance, received orders to march his Spanish battalions to chastise the arrogance of Paul IV. in 1556, he obtained no better result from his easy victories, than to be admitted to kiss the foot of the vanquished pontiff, and accept for himself and his master such conditions as it pleased the haughty Caraffa to dictate. Since that time the efforts of both powers were exclusively directed to the extirpation of heresy; and, for the furtherance of this interest, the popes might implicitly rely on the friendship and alliance of the catholic king, and feel sure of his reverence and submission; the only subject of discrepancy between them invariably arising from ill-grounded apprehensions on the part of Spain, lest the pope might relax from his vigour so far as to allow the rebels of Flanders to take breath, or to grant his absolution to a repentant Huguenot.

Alas! both Rome and Spain were but too earnest in their deplorable competition; and, although their efforts for a counter-reformation were only partially successful in France and Germany, and were wholly vain in Flanders and England, they did not fail in Italy to extinguish, together with the germs of Protestantism, also the last remnants of personal freedom and energy, and to paralyse the last efforts of intellectual activity.

The warm controversies, to which the springing up of so many new doctrines had given rise, had finally roused the Italians from their religious indifference. It had determined the conviction of the waverer, and rekindled the zeal of the believer. It had made the clergy aware of the necessity of counteracting the protestant by a catholic reform.

The long and stormy sessions of the Council of Trent, which had so far contributed to widen the breach between the two contending factions, to strengthen papal despotism, to sanction by their authority those very articles of belief that had proved most obnoxious to the reformers, to encourage the animosity of narrow-minded zealots, had, however, operated a salutary revolution.

It marked the epoch of a new era of catholicism. It led to the institution of new religious orders—to the restoration of a rigid discipline among the clergy: it deterred the Roman prelates, at least, from an open indulgence in their luxurious propensities: it compelled vice to hide its infamies from the public gaze.

The popes themselves, now struggling for their very existence, all engrossed by the pious cares of their anti-heretic crusade, began to remit from their worldly ambition. Paul III. and IV. gave the last examples of that scandalous *nepotism* which had been the besetting sin of papacy from its primordial rise: the first by investing his natural son, Pier Luigi Farnese, with the sovereignty of Parma; the second by bestowing on the Caraffa, his nephews, the fiefs which he had usurped from the Colonna. Pius V. put an end to similar grants by his bull, dated 1567, prohibiting any further infeudation of church property. Since that time, the relations of a pope might still, indeed, have great ascendancy over the administration of his government—might even influence the election of his successor; but the lasting evils resulting from the hereditary ambition of a Riario or Borgia could never return.

But the subjects of the Roman see had no great reason to congratulate themselves on the independence of their sovereign, or on the paramount importance that he attached to his spiritual interests.

From its earliest instalment to the present age, the administration of the papal dominions has been signalised for its want of foresight, compactness, and uniformity.

The decrepitude and infirmities of the chief of the state ; the frequent recurrence of interregnums and re-elections, an illiberal spirit of contradiction so strangely contrasting with the dogma of infallibility ; the confusion of spiritual and temporal powers, invariably involved the Roman Curia in a chaos of misrule and inconsistency.

But in the period to which we allude Rome had little or no leisure to attend to the worldly welfare of her subjects. The catholic world was in a state of open warfare ; and the provinces belonging to the head of the church were laid rather under a military than a theocratic rule. Bologna, Ferrara, Rimini, and Ancona, all the towns of Romagna, were forcibly deprived even of the last shadow of their municipal constitutions, to be submitted to the arbitrament of a legate and the Inquisition ;—the Roman states were drained to their last resources to subsidise the champions of the church in France and the Netherlands, or to hire the poniards of a Jacques Clement or Ravallac. Famine and pestilence, piracy and brigandage, devoured the victims of papal improvidence. Sixty thousand persons were swept off in one summer, in the metropolis alone, by the scourge of 1590.

All ideas of justice, faith, and humanity, were subverted by bulls that sanctioned rebellion and regicide ; by the thanksgivings offered up to Heaven in all Catholic churches, at the first intelligence of the day of the barricades, or Saint Bartholomew's eve.

Under such ominous influence the era of foreign bondage was announced in Italy ; and if we reflect how many long-lasting irreparable calamities befell that country at once— if we dwell on every page of the blood-stained annals of the Spanish dominion, and enumerate all the religious and civil causes of demoralisation—far from being surprised at the state of corruption and debasement in which the Italians have fallen, we shall only have reason to wonder how that people can still preserve the outward forms, at

least, of general civilisation and culture, and how, indeed, they still bear the very aspect and semblance of men.

Yet the fallen race still clung to its former greatness with all the strength of southern vitality.

Subdued, as they were, by the force of arms, they seemed yet unwilling to yield to their foreign conquerors the glory of military supremacy. During all the period of the civil struggles of Flanders and the thirty years' war, Italy gave, not unfrequently the steadiest combatants, always the ablest leaders. Spain had no greater generals than Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy, or Alexander Farnese, the third Duke of Parma; and the mildness and moderation of the two Italian heroes admirably contrasted with the Teutonic obstinacy of Don Juan of Austria, and the bloodthirsty intolerance of the Duke of Alva.

The maritime valour of Genoa had not expired with Andrea Doria. Frederic Spinola was still, from 1598 to 1603, the greatest admiral of Philip II.; whilst Ambrogio, his eldest brother, wasted the immense fortune of his house to levy a legion of 10,000 Lombards, at the head of whom he repeatedly restored the vacillating fortunes of Spain. Farnese and Spinola were the only warriors that Henry IV. and Maurice of Nassau consented to acknowledge their rivals; and the Lombard legions, which they led to victory, gave such examples of valour, fidelity, and discipline, as the Italians seldom displayed in the defence of a better cause. Whilst these warriors were lavish of their blood in the service of the oppressors of their country, the descendants of Italian exiles reaped equal laurels in France. The two sons of Filippo Strozzi, in the vain hope of being enabled to avenge their father's doom, enlisted in the ranks of the enemies of their country's enemy. Leo Strozzi, the younger, admiral of France, was the worthy competitor of Andrea Doria. Piero, his eldest brother, an ardent, enterprising, but unfortunate adventurer, and his son Filippo, one of the

greatest generals of his age, were successively raised to the supreme command of the French armies. The three Strozzi all fell young in battle, but not before leaving such testimonials of their valour and genius as might secure their name against oblivion. San Piero, also, the fierce and daring Corsican rebel, and his son and grandson—the Ornano, both marshals of France, may, perhaps, be numbered among the Italian warriors; since San Piero himself learned the art of war under Giovanni de Medici, the famous leader of the *Bande Nere*; since they were, during all their lifetime, envied and hated as foreigners at the French court; and, in short, since the fashion of adopting a Napoleon, or disavowing a Fieschi, according as it suited their vanity, had not yet arisen in France.

There ensued a constant emigration of Italian volunteers to Spain, to France, and Germany; increasing in proportion as the great mass of the nation sank into enervation and indolence. The age of Eugene and Montecuccoli succeeded to that of Farnese and Spinola. A vague spirit of military adventure lingered still in the heart of some of the nobility; nor was it yet utterly extinguished at the epoch of the last European convulsions, when our young conscripts were called to join the standards of Beauharnais or Murat: it cost their leaders no great trouble to teach the Italians how to turn their face to the enemy.

I have insisted, perhaps, too long on this point, because there have been recent facts—such as the insurrections of 1820, or the naval expedition to Tripoli, which, rather uncharitably and undiscerningly judged of from the event, have reflected on the military character of the Neapolitans, if not of all the Italians—a disgrace, to which that people, proud as they may have some reason to be, of the laurels they reaped during the Napoleonic campaigns, are not much inclined to submit.

It certainly appears very strange that, in our age, when recent examples have demonstrated how the best soldiers

could be made out of the most effeminate people, out of the vilest recruits; when every political sign seems to point to the establishment of universal peace, and martial prowess is likely to become a quality of the least consequence—so much stress should be laid on the aptitude of any nation for war, and the Italians or Neapolitans should be so undistinguishably stigmatised as an unwarlike and dastardly race.

But our task will probably again give us opportunity to return to this painful subject. Be it sufficient to have stated for the present that, in the days of Strozzi and Spinola, Italy had not yet altogether laid aside the sword, though Heaven knows it was only:

“Per servir sempre o vincitrice o vinta.”

As in the battle-field the slaves had not yet given up the supreme command, so neither had they entirely abandoned their claims to their intellectual ascendancy. The impulse given to men's minds by previous ages could only gradually abate. Indeed the Italians were no more aware of their rapid decline than the patient is who has received a paralyzing stroke.

They were bred up with the fond illusions of their fathers, that theirs was the soil where genius grows wild, the land of laurel and myrtle, the birthplace of poetry and art. They could hardly believe that the sacred fire of inspiration had migrated beyond the Alps, to warm the fancy of an English dramatist or a Dutch painter; that genius could breathe in a climate where there springs no vine.

Their schools and academies still flourished: their poets and artists were more numerous than ever. All was still to be found in their verses and paintings that a lively imagery, a melodious language, a luxurious colouring, could afford.

But the energy and manliness of conception, the nerve

and conciseness of diction, the boldness and rapidity of execution, had ceased with the consciousness of dignity and security which the enjoyment of civil freedom had engendered. Deprived of the genuine sources of inspiration, poets and artists made up for their want of true feeling by affectation and effort, by a spurious refinement, by overwrought figures and far-fetched contrast, by those false conceits, in fine, which characterised the schools of Guido and Marini.

They acted like a man exhausted by long indulgence in dissolute habits, who has recourse to those very liquors which unmanned him, as if with a hope that alcohol could perform the functions of blood.

We have already noticed that the germs of this false lustre, of this emasculate morbidness, are to be discovered in the poetry of Tasso and Guarini. But they were soon to receive full development under the influence of that great corrupter of the national taste, the first of the *Seicentisti*—Giambattista Marini.

Marini was contemporary with Tasso, and was even brought into contact with him at the house of Manso in Naples. One of his earliest patrons was that Cardinal Aldobrandino who is said to have received the last breath of Torquato. This prelate introduced Marini to the court of Charles Emmanuel of Savoy. Marini was a man of a frank and generous disposition. The rivalry of an ignoble adversary, who had recourse to assassination and calumny to drive him from Turin, obliged him to take shelter in France, where he met with the most flattering reception from Mary de Medici. Later in life, love of country induced him to accept an invitation of Pope Gregory XV. His reception at Rome and Naples was little short of a royal triumph. Public enthusiasm pointed to him as the greatest poet of his age*.

* Giambattista Marini, born at Naples, A.D. 1569; died at Naples,

Marini was undoubtedly a poet. Indeed, his fault rather consisted in the abuse, than in any defect of poetical faculties. He suffered his reason to be overcome by a vague love of novelty: he abandoned himself to the exuberance of his fancy; and that false glare had equally the power to fascinate the judgment of his contemporaries at home and abroad.

But Marini's faults were partly atoned for by redeeming qualities. His verses were not unfrequently free from that corruption to which he was, justly or unjustly, accused of leading the way. Not a few of the stanzas of his "Adone" are still to be numbered among the finest specimens of Italian versification. But his imitators, whose talent merely consisted in a blind exaggeration of his defects, sank deeper and deeper into exaggeration and bombast, until the soundest principles of taste were subverted.

An equal degeneration was discernible in every province of literature. Sacred eloquence, which, in that age of religious fervour, might be expected to have soared so high, which gave rise in France to such geniuses as Bourdaloue or Bossuet, was contaminated with the same corrupting poison. With the exception, perhaps, of Segneri, there was not one among the Italian preachers that did not derive his sources of religious emotion from the inflated style of the Seicentisti. That same tinselled lustre shines forth, likewise, throughout every page of the otherwise eloquent Jesuit, Bartoli, the herald of the heroic exploits of the missionaries of his order*.

Thus was the *Seicento* first ushered into Italy.

But among those few, whom either a real soundness of mind, or, perhaps, a natural reluctance to follow in the

1625. "L'Adone," Paris, 1621. "La Murtoleide," Venice, 1626. "La Strage degli Innocenti," Venice, 1626, &c.

* Daniele Bartoli, born at Ferrara, A.D. 1608; died, 1685.

footsteps of others, providentially preserved from prevailing contagion, we find names that live still honoured and revered in the memory of after generations.

The veneration of Italy for the name of Torquato seemed to deter the writers of the following century from attempting epic poetry. The "Adone" of Marini, a poem which exceeded in length the "Orlando" of Ariosto, was rather a mythological tale than an epopée; and the few other works in the heroic style which appeared in that age can scarcely be said to have ever existed.

But a more lasting fame has been attached to a new style of composition, in which Tassoni, Lippi, and Bracciolini, especially excelled—the heroi-comic poetry.

Of this kind of poetry I confess myself a most incompetent judge. Poetry, painting, and music, have, in my opinion, a nobler mission on earth than to minister to our mirth: and they are never prostituted to that exclusive object, without derogating from their natural dignity. Ariosto and Berni had, already, in their chivalrous poems, indulged their comic vein, as far, perhaps, as might be safely attempted, and not without detriment to the general interest of their works. But in the "Secchia Rapita," in the "Scherno degli Dei," and "Malmantile Riacquisitato," we would look in vain for the bold sallies of Ariosto's playful fancy, or for the naïve graces of Berni's spontaneous humour. Farcical vulgarity, and puerile trivialness, have taken the place of genuine *vis comica*. We may sometimes be taken by surprise, and laugh in spite of ourselves; but a feeling of disgust and self-reproach is sure to attend that moment of involuntary hilarity*.

And yet those poems, especially the "Rape of the Bucket," enjoy still a wide popularity; and Tassoni owes to that work a celebrity which he better deserved by his

* Alessandro Tassoni, born at Modena, A.D. 1563; died, 1635. "La Secchia Rapita," 1622.

bold aversion to Spanish oppression—by his critical works, which so powerfully contributed to emancipate his contemporaries from their superstitious reverence for antiquity, and to put an end to their idolatry for Petrarch.

The satires of the cold but argute Menzini, and, more so, those of Salvator Rosa—the first framed after the model of Horace; the latter, displaying true original talent, might better deserve our attention. Salvator Rosa, whose boldness of genius, and frankness, and wildness of character, rather raised him to the level of the artists of Michael Angelo's age, than of his effeminate contemporaries, was, for his vehemence and vigour as a satirical poet, second to none but Ariosto*.

Still lyrical poetry was the style in which the seventeenth century chiefly excelled; and that branch of literature was brought to a degree of elevation unprecedented in Italy. Indeed, with the exception of the amorous style of Petrarch—which a natural reaction against the sameness and servility of the previous age, and the efforts of Tassoni and other critics, vigorously strove to proscribe—it may be asserted that the ode arose in Italy in the age of Marini. It was the last style of classical composition that the Italians revived in their imitations.

The first of Pindaric and Anacreontic poets was Gabriello Chiabrera, a native of Savona—a man who entertained no slight opinion of his own abilities, and who said he would, like his countryman, Columbus, “discover new worlds, or perish in the attempt.” His glory as an inventor chiefly consisted, however, in forcing the Italian language into all the trammels of Greek versification. The form, rather than the substance, of his poetry was new. His lyrical enthusiasm seems to be frozen all over by his adherence to his Greek models; and, notwithstanding his vast collection

* Salvator Rosa, born at Naples, A.D. 1615; died, 1673. Flourished chiefly at Rome and Florence.

of poems in every style, Chiabrera is very likely to meet soon with the fate of more venturous than fortunate navigators*.

But higher claims to the merit of Pindaric inspiration may be brought forward by two poets that flourished later in the seventeenth century—Guidi and Filicaia†.

There lived then in Rome a lady, who had come from the remotest regions of the north, preceded by the reputation of a saint and a heroine; who had abdicated the throne, and abjured the faith of her great father, for the sake of the sun, of the processions and carnivals of fair Italy; who called around her a crowd of Jesuits and prelates, of artists and literati; who lavished her gold to commend her soul to priests, her fame to poets.

Her strange dress; her wild sallies of passion; her harsh, despotic temper; and, above all, the cruel treatment of her Italian favourite, Monaldeschi, had, indeed, partly broken the charm attached to her name, since she first threw herself at the feet of Alexander VII., in 1555, and hung up her sceptre and crown on the sanctuary of Loretto.

Still, men of talent continued to gather around a patroness whose collection of medals and statues—whose galleries and libraries gave ample proofs of liberality and taste—though we might, perhaps, be permitted to opine that the air of Italy had not yet quite freed her from the last remnants of Scandinavian barbarism, if we were to believe, with her biographers, “that she clipped two of the finest paintings of Titian, which she had purchased at an extravagant price, in order to fit them to the panels of her gallery.”

At any rate Christina showed more discernment in her

* Gabriello Chiabrera, born, A.D. 1552; died, 1637. Complete edition of his works, 4 vols. 8vo. Venice, 1731.

† Alessandro Guidi, born, A.D. 1650; died, 1712. “*Poesie Liriche*,” Parma, 1681. “*L’Endimione*,” Rome, 1692.—Vincenzo da Filicaia, born at Florence, 1642; died, 1707. “*Poesie Toscane*,” Florence, 1706.

estimate of poetical worth. She was one of the first to declare against the bad style of the school of Marini; and, in 1680, she founded an academy, the avowed object of which was to put an end to the absurdities of the Seicentisti, and which, soon afterwards, in 1690, gave rise to the *Arcadia*.

Among the most active instruments of that important reform there was Christina's greatest friend, a young prelate from Pavia, by name, Alessandro Guidi, in whose "*Endymion*" the queen herself deigned to insert a few of her verses.

Guidi had the name of the greatest lyricist in Italy. The flow, warmth, and harmony of his style; its grandeur and majesty; the ease and spontaneousness of his free measure gave his poesy a loftiness which dreads no comparison—only Guidi wanted a subject worthy of his genius; and we have often occasion to regret that, after having abandoned ourselves to the charm of that high-flowing grandiloquence, we fall, as if from the clouds, at the announcement of the hero or even heroine of the poem.

But what was wanting in Guidi is amply found in the works of Filicaia. This poet, almost the only one in the seventeenth century who wrote under the immediate impulse of genuine feeling, and drew inspiration from the importance of his theme, was first aroused from silence by a startling event which threatened Europe with imminent ruin—the siege of Vienna by the Turks, in 1683. He was not long afterwards more painfully affected by the first ravages of the wars for the succession of Spain, at the opening of the eighteenth century.

The religious and patriotic soul of Filicaia, embodied in a plain, true, but highly impressive language, had power to recall his age from ebriety and delirium. His verses are the only composition of the seventeenth century still living, and sure to live eternally in the hearts of the Italians.

Whilst Chiabrera attempted to revive that Pindaric style which Guidi and Filicaia afterwards emulated, another poet, endowed with a more gentle genius, Fulvio Testi, of Modena, gave us a very able imitation of the chaste and nitid manner of Horace.

This noble and unfortunate bard was born at Ferrara, shortly before the illegitimate heir of Alphonso II. was driven from the throne of his ancestors, and had followed with his parents the fortunes of Este, at Modena. The reigning duke was then Francis I., a warlike prince, who, during the wars for the succession of Mantua, by turns espoused the party of Spain or France, and by his valour caused the fortune of either power to prevail. He governed with a strong and steady hand, and his small states enjoyed under his sway a high degree of prosperity. But the court of Este was still that same slippery ground that had already proved so fatal to Tasso and Guarini. Harassed during all his lifetime by a perpetual alternation of smiles and frowns, Testi was finally imprisoned in 1646, and almost immediately perished in his dungeon. His fate was involved in a dark veil of mystery which no human ingenuity has yet been able to tear asunder*.

The most plausible version is, that one of his odes gave offence to a great personage, whose influence with the duke caused the poet's imprudence to be visited with so awful a punishment. That too famous ode, "*Ruscelletto Orgoglioso*," and a few others in the same style, are distinguished by a purity, and, at the same time, a vigour of diction, which might well belong to a happier age of Italian literature.

Meanwhile, the poetry of Guidi and Filicaia, the efforts of the academy of Christina of Sweden, and the institution of the Roman Arcadia, of which both those illustrious poets were members, and which soon spread its colonies all over

* Fulvio Testi, born, A.D. 1593; died, 1646. "*Rime*," Venice, 1613.

the country, had finally put an end to the hyperbolical style of the Seicentisti, and given a new direction to the public taste.

It brought into light a new school of poetry, which flourished towards the close of the seventeenth and part of the following century; and which, although less liable to the charge of vicious exuberance and intemperance, soon became almost as contemptible for its languor, affectation, and effeminacy. This is the poetry of the Arcadians, of which Zappi was the first master, and which ended with Metastasio.

The sonnets of Zappi, exquisite, even to lusciousness, are read not without admiration even in our days; but we would rather give preference to some of his wife's—the high-minded Faustina. This lady was born of Carlo Maratti, one of the best painters of the Roman school, who was loaded with honours by Pope Clement XI. and Louis XIV. It was from the hands of Clement himself that his *protégé* Zappi, an advocate from Bologna, received his accomplished bride*. Faustina, left alone and unprotected, by the loss of her father and husband, found herself an object of that fervent homage which beauty and talent united never failed to excite. Among her *patiti*, we are told, there was an unprincipled Roman baron, who suffered his admiration to give place to passions of a more dangerous nature. Wounded by Faustina's repulses, he had recourse to such a scheme of unmanly vengeance as only a fiend could suggest. In the midst of a brilliant circle of Roman beauties, of which Faustina was the best ornament, he threw the contents of a vial, full of nitric acid and gunpowder, at her face. Her guardian angel, however—pretty women always have one—screened her with his wings, so

* Giambattista Felice Zappi, born, A.D. 1667; died, 1719. "Poesie di Felice Zappi e Faustina Maratti." Venice, 1770.—Carlo Maratti, born, 1625; died, 1713.

that, of that Stygian water, only one drop was suffered to fall on her left cheek, leaving a dark spot above the upper lip—a slight mole which, contrasted with the unmatched whiteness of her complexion, enhanced the charms of that beauty which the felon flattered himself to have blighted for ever.

To the infamy of that age be it said, so villanous an attempt was left unpunished: but Faustina did not fail to transmit to posterity the record of her grievances; though, whether through generosity, or apprehension that her verses might consign to immortality her vile aggressor, she refused to mention his name.

These were the writers of the seventeenth century; and if we reflect that the times of Philip II. were likewise the age of Elizabeth, and that the reigns of his successors correspond with those of Louis XIII. and XIV.; if we compare those few half-obliterated names with Shakspeare and Milton, Corneille and Molière, Lope and Calderon; or even if we bring the painters of the schools of Carlo Dolce or Guercino, to the level of Rubens or Rembrandt—we shall be amazed at the change that scarcely a century had operated in Italy; and however unwilling to attribute to political causes too great an ascendancy over art and literature, we shall only state the fact, that the downfall of all eminence of genius in Italy dates from the very dawn of the fatal era of Spanish oppression.

But the seventeenth century arose under the auspices of Galileo. The decline and corruption of poetry and the fine arts were coeval with the promotion of the interests of science, and partly attributable to it. The advancement of experimental philosophy gradually diminished the veneration of the Italians for the works of antiquity. Active minds rushed into the new field so widely spread open before them, with all the eagerness of an enterprising age. Compared with the results of scientific discovery, the mere charms of style appeared languid and idle; the talents of

the poet and artist were looked upon as feminine accomplishments. Exornative literature yielded to positive knowledge; form to matter.

Though flourishing nearly at the same age, Tasso and Galileo marked the confines of two distinct periods. Tasso was the last of poets; Galileo the first of philosophers.

We left Galileo, it will be remembered, a professor of mathematics at Pisa, at war with the Aristotelian philosophers, and enjoying the patronage of the house of Medici. He had been appointed, by the special favour of Ferdinand, the third Grand Duke of Tuscany, the only one of the numerous offspring of Cosmo I. who had not perished a victim to the domestic tragedies by which the reign of that tyrant was ominously signalised. Ferdinand had abandoned the sanguinary policy of his father and brother, and strove to revive the glories of republican Tuscany. He removed the last remnants of the Pisan marine to Leghorn, till then only an obscure borough, which owed him its commerce, its franchises, its very existence. He mustered the knights of St. Stephen into a military body, and appointed them to the command of his galleys, which were then not unsuccessfully cruising in the Levant.

Strange, that these maritime enterprises should interfere with Galileo's tranquillity! Persecuted by the malignity of Don Giovanni de Medici, a bastard brother of the duke, on account of his disapprobation of the plan that that prince had laid out for clearing the harbour of Leghorn, the philosopher was obliged to remove to Padua, where he professed mathematics from 1592 to 1609, under the protection of the Republic of Venice.

Venice had not yet been compelled, by the treacherous attacks of Spain, to have recourse to those measures of pusillanimous policy, so unworthy of its primeval institutions. As yet, secure and respected, it had, ever since its last Turkish expeditions in 1573, enjoyed a long period of thriving peace. Arts and letters flourished by the side of

trade and industry: the spirit of independence revived together with the consciousness of strength and security. Venice was still the shelter of the persecuted and vanquished—the England of other days.

But the senate had, towards that epoch, endangered its tranquillity by its *démêlés* with Rome. To this power Venice had given some pretext of complaint by its diplomatic negotiations with the Protestants of France, Holland, and Germany, among whom it sought its natural allies against the overwhelming ascendancy of Spain.

These, and other ill-concealed germs of mutual rancour, burst forth into open hostilities, under Paul V., in 1606, in consequence of the contest of ecclesiastical immunities. During that momentous debate—the obvious result of which might have led to a total emancipation of Venice from the Catholic bondage, without the apathy of the Protestant powers, the imbecility of James I. of England, and the pacific interposition of Henry IV. of France—the Republic had found a valiant champion in the person of its consultor of state, the great historian of the Council of Trent—Fra Paolo Sarpi. Sarpi, whose unswerving, though inoffensive mind, had already rendered him obnoxious to Rome, felt for his native country, besides the natural attachment of every Venetian for the name of St. Mark, a personal gratitude for the protection that the Republic afforded to freedom of inquiry. Aware of the influence that his superior abilities might have on the fate of his country, he devoted himself to its cause, and entered the lists against the great propugner of papal authority—Cardinal Bellarmine*. He supported the rights of the senate to an unlimited, inalienable jurisdiction in temporal matters, with a zeal to which, as we have seen, he nearly fell a victim. The differences between Venice and Rome being

* Roberto Bellarmino, born in Tuscany, A.D. 1542; a cardinal, 1599; died, 1621.

brought to a close, and Sarpi having recovered from the consequences of the aggression of the pope's emissaries, he withdrew to the silence of his cloister, with his characteristic modesty, and gave himself up to his historical work, and to those scientific pursuits, in which he obtained an ample share in the glory of the optical and physiological discoveries of his two friends, Della Porta and Acquapendente.

In the service of such a government, and in the intercourse of such men, seventeen years of Galileo's life were spent; nor could he look back to any other period of his agitated life with a more unmingled satisfaction. In an evil hour for him, Cosmo II., successor of Ferdinand of Tuscany, was moved by his fame to invite him to return; and the love of his native place persuaded the philosopher to abandon a refuge which could best protect him in Italy against the storms that were gathering around his head. The telescope that Galileo left at his departure, as a memento to the senate, together with the "style of the Roman Curia," which the assassin of Sarpi had left in the wound, were preserved as precious relics as long as the glory of Venice endured.

Settled at Florence, Galileo directed towards the heavens that instrument, which, were he even to yield the glory of its invention to Giambattista della Porta, or to some obscure Dutch artificer, he was certainly the first to turn to any important purpose.

What wonders the heavens revealed to the newly armed eye of the great observer, need not be here related. From 1610 to 1615, since the first publication of his "Intelligence from the Stars," the world was kept in suspense by the enigmas to which he had recourse in order to prevent the encroachments of his rivals, and which he solved by those Latin verses:—

"Altissimam planetam tergemina observari."

"Cynthiæ figuras æmulatur Mater Amorum"—

each of which seemed to widen the firmament, and bring man one step nearer to his Creator.

Meanwhile, the war of prejudice and superstition commenced. Every one of his new publications called forth endless controversies. Many of the Aristotelian sectarians resisted his warmest entreaties to look through his telescope; others contended that they could see nothing through it; and some of the most ingenuous, whilst admitting the visibility of the new phenomena, attributed them to diabolical illusions, and brought forward their arguments to deny their existence. At last, the Dominican Caccini came to an open declaration of hostilities, by exclaiming from the pulpit, at Florence, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here looking into heaven?"

Galileo hastened to gather the gauntlet. He desired nothing so ardently as to grapple with ignorance; to attack it even within the stronghold of the sanctuary. He knew the age was mature. Concealing an impatient, indomitable temper under the appearance of cheerful, insinuating manners, he had secured the personal friendship of powerful personages, and felt strong in his immense popularity.

But he knew as well that his was to be a war of address rather than open force. The recent fate of Giordano Bruno stood glaring before his eyes. Cosmo II. was indeed his staunch supporter; but Galileo knew better than to rely on the favour of a Medici. Had not another Cosmo given up his best friend, Carnesecchi, for the sake of an empty title? He had risen from his seat among the joys of a domestic banquet, and consigned his unsuspecting guest to the Roman inquisitor!

Galileo would not give his enemies the satisfaction of burning him alive. He knew that, whilst he lived, there was no rest for them. He resolved to fight by evasion and stratagem: to yield where resistance could be of no avail.

It was not that he stood in any apprehension of personal

danger. Had he only thought of his safety, were there not a hundred Protestant lands eager to welcome the illustrious emigrant? But he wanted to combat prejudice on its own ground, to baffle papal and jesuitical rage on the very threshold of the Vatican.

He would be no martyr, but a conqueror!

He had justly appreciated the chances of the day. He was well aware that he had friends and confederates even in the enemy's encampments. The popes were not always adverse to his principles. Paul V., with whom he had a private interview, at the epoch of his first summons before the Inquisition in 1615, assured him, that whilst he was seated on the papal throne, none of his opponents could prevail against him. Seven years later he had been invited to Rome by Urban VIII., at his exaltation, and liberal pensions had been bestowed upon him and his son. It was that same Urban who had rescued Campanella from the hands of his Spanish tormentors—the same that had appointed Galileo's friend and pupil, Castelli, to the place of his mathematician and astronomer. One of the pope's friends, Prince Federico Cesi, was the founder of that famous Roman academy, Dei Lincei, which numbered Galileo among its first members, and which, more or less, openly embraced his views.

But on the other hand, he perceived that his reconciliation with the church was neither unlimited nor unconditional. He saw ignorance and fanaticism still lurking among the ranks of the papal militia. He longed to come to an open engagement. He placed himself in the forlorn hope of that unequal combat: he did not come off unscathed, but secured victory to his side.

In 1632, he gave out at Florence his "System of the World," for which he had, through the favour of his friends, obtained the licence of the censors at Rome. He had promised to his first judge, Cardinal Bellarmine, in 1615, never again to teach the theory of the earth's motion,

which had brought him once before the inquisitorial tribunal.

He did not defend that system; but his dialogues contained all arguments pro and contra; nor was it his fault if the Ptolemaic theory could not stand the full glare of broad daylight.

Urban VIII. was incensed against him. Those of Galileo's friends who survived at Rome were dismissed. The Grand Duke Ferdinand II., successor of Cosmo II., though not without reluctance, abandoned him to his fate. He was brought before the Holy Office at Rome, in 1633, already overcome by age and infirmities.

He offered no resistance. He felt that the battle had been fought and won. The rest was of little consequence to him or to the world. He abjured—he abandoned his theories; but when he felt assured that they were utterly, incontrovertibly, eternally demonstrated; when he was certain that they had become the inheritance of the latest posterity; he rose from the feet of the tribunal—he stamped on the ground, and exclaimed, with that dreaded ironical smile that was habitual to him—"Eppure si muove!"—It has moved ever since.

He died blind, broken-hearted, and weary, a prisoner of the Inquisition, in his own house at Arcetri, in 1642. The Dominicans refused to bury him in consecrated ground. His countrymen entombed him in Santa Croce—the Westminster of Italy. Permission to erect his monument was denied by the popes till thirty years after his death*.

The telescopic discoveries of Galileo, to which he owed his popular celebrity, do not constitute his greatest claims to the title of founder of modern science in Italy. Neither

* Galileo's works: "Nuntius Sidereus," Padua, A.D. 1610. "Dialoghi Dei due Massimi Sistemi del Mondo," Florence, 1632. "Scienza Meccanica," 1634. "Nuova Scienza," 1638. Complete edition of his works, Padua, 1744.

does his glory rest on those luminous theories by which the laws of mechanics, statics, and dynamics, were first established, as much as it does on that moral courage and perseverance to which science is indebted for its final emancipation. Galileo offered himself as an expiatory victim on the altar of truth: the victim was immolated, but truth prevailed. After Galileo's death no attempt was made on the part of the church to combat the theory of the earth's motion. None of his pupils were persecuted. The memory of his grievances was their safeguard.

It was the fortune of Galileo to leave behind him a number of great men, all entitled by their genius to accomplish the mission to which he had led the way.

Castelli and Torricelli, the first his best friend and advocate at the court of Urban, who died of sorrow soon after his death; the last his inseparable companion in his hours of illness—are justly considered as the creators of the science of hydraulics. Another of his pupils, Cavalieri, had no slight share in the progress of mathematics, by his treatise of indivisibles; whilst Borelli, also one of the few who stood by Galileo's death-bed, gave a new impulse to physiological pursuits, by his unrivalled work on the *Mechanics of Animal Movement*.

Finally, the last but most enthusiastic of his disciples—the good and modest Viviani—received the homage of all the academies of Europe, who acknowledged him as the greatest mathematician of his age.

The influence of Galileo's fame, and the efforts of his pupils, spread a great lustre on the whole of the seventeenth century. After the dispersion of the Lyncean Academy in 1630, the friends of Galileo rallied in Florence; and, under the patronage of Leopoldo de Medici, brother of the Grand Duke Ferdinand II., founded, in 1657, the most famous scientific institution in Italy, under the name of the academy "*del Cimento*." The first members of that illustrious, though short-lived association,

were, besides Borelli and Viviani, the physicians Malpighi, Magalotti, Bellini, and the accomplished Redi, who, to his profound knowledge of natural sciences, added an exquisite taste for polite literature, and gave Italy the best specimen of dithyrambic poetry.

Thus, although Gassendi, Descartes, and Kepler, were contemporaneous with Galileo, and Newton was born in the very year of his death, still, as long as the spirit of the great philosopher survived, Italy had not yielded her boast of scientific supremacy. Louis XIV. seemed at least to think so; for he had recourse to the most tempting offers to invite, and almost to violence to detain, Cassini at his court, as if in despair to find, on the other side of the Alps, another whom he might trust with the care of his newly erected observatory.

The descendants of that illustrious Italian have, during four generations, equally inherited his place and his fame, adding to the glory of a name which Italy and France equally claimed as their own.

CHAPTER II.

ALFIERI

Political Events at the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century :
 Changes in the National Character—History : Muratori, Tiraboschi,
 Giannone—The Opera : Metastasio, Casti—Comedy : Goldoni—
Cicisbeism—Parini—Present State of the Opera and Comedy—
 Alfieri—His Character—His Style.

MEANWHILE, at the opening of the eighteenth century, Europe was convulsed with war. The last descendants of the house of Charles V. in Spain, after having consummated the utter ruin of their Italian provinces, left them, at their extinction, a prey to the ambition of the different powers of Europe. The peace of Utrecht, in 1713, adjudged them to the imperial house of Austria. Presently, new political interests gave rise to fresh contentions; and when Italy was finally suffered to be definitely at rest at the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 1748, it was once more reduced under the supreme, though less unlimited, ascendancy of Austria.

During those eight-and-forty years of European calamities, the different states of Italy were invaded with incessant vicissitudes. The greatest number of the Italian princely families had become extinct; their dominions passed under the rule of new dynasties; they were by turns incorporated or partitioned according to the chances of victory—sold or bartered in compliance with diplomatic speculation; but the Italian people were never consulted

as to their ultimate destination, nor ever stood up in vindication of their rights.

This state of passive submissiveness was not so much the consequence of the utter extinction of public spirit in Italy, as of the new ideas of legitimacy arising from the consolidation of monarchical power, and the gradual suppression of feudal and municipal orders, all over the continent. It had at least the effect of preventing evils, that a powerless resistance would otherwise have brought upon the country.

The final results of those complicated hostilities were also less unfavourable to Italy than might have been expected from its helplessness and inactivity. The mutual jealousy of the different potentates that weighed its fate at Aix-la-Chapelle, left that country in possession of a greater share of independence than it could boast of at the opening of that period of warfare.

The house of Savoy, accustomed to profit by every European disturbance, had reached its height of power during the wars for the Spanish and Austrian succession. The frequent defections, and the false policy of those wary princes, had, indeed, repeatedly brought them to the last brink of ruin; but the valour of Prince Eugene, the greatest hero of his age, had restored the fortunes of his house; and, besides the addition of wide territories to their ancestral dominions in Piedmont, the princes of Savoy had exchanged their ducal coronet for a royal diadem.

In the south, the Spanish provinces of Naples and Sicily, after two centuries of foreign bondage, were erected into an independent kingdom, and given to a prince of the Bourbons of Spain; whilst another of the lackland infants of that house had been accommodated with the duchy of Parma after the extinction of the last Farnese—Milan and Mantua had been allotted to Austria; and a prince of the new imperial line had ascended the vacant throne of Tuscany.

Such were the political changes inflicted on Italy by that long alternation of warlike and diplomatic transactions. But it was not difficult to perceive that all that remained of national power had been extinguished long before this new arrangement took place. Such of the Italian states as were not immediately implicated in those endless disputes were unable to protect themselves, notwithstanding their improvident schemes of neutrality. Venice and Genoa, whose last shade of republican institutions were obnoxious to the despotic policy of the age, were more wantonly, and with more impunity, trampled upon. Venice, stripped of its last oriental possessions by the war of the Morea in 1718; Genoa, subdued and humbled by the unprovoked attack of Louis XIV. in 1684, deprived of the island of Corsica in consequence of its own mismanagement—both impoverished by the rapid extinction of their Mediterranean trade—those two republics lingered on in a state of dotage and torpor, awaiting their final hour of dissolution.

The papal power also, both spiritual and temporal, gave symptoms of rapid decline. Braved in their own capital by the insolence of the ambassadors of Louis XIV. in 1662, harassed by the schismatic controversies of the Jansenists, which led to an almost total emancipation of the Gallican clergy; deprived of the support of the Jesuits, whose relaxed discipline and perverted morals, and the universal abhorrence of all Europe, finally determined Clement XIV. on their final suppression in 1773; compelled to behold the frequent violation of their neutral territories, and to submit to arbitrary encroachments on their feudal rights—the popes of the eighteenth century, for the most part as wise, liberal, and moderate a set of men as ever sat on the chair of St. Peter, felt that they were doomed to atone for the deeds of iniquity of their predecessors, and seemed perpetually haunted by the forebodings of their imminent destruction.

Thus tottered and crumbled all that belonged to old

Italy. What had been left standing by Charles V. was shaken to its foundations by Louis XIV.; what had escaped the ravages of Louis XIV. was, after a short interval, to be levelled to the ground by Napoleon.

But the moral energies of the conquered nation had undergone a more vital change than its political condition. The fierce spirit that the civil feuds of republican anarchy had engendered and nourished—that the lawless oppression of Spain had aggravated and perverted, had yielded before the long influence of a corruptive refinement, and the long desuetude of arms. Of all nations of Europe, the Italians, both as a people, and even as individuals, may be said to have taken the least part in the wars of the eighteenth century; and though they were far indeed from being free from the disasters of military vastation and licentiousness, still they seemed to consider silent, unarmed endurance as the best safeguard against inevitable aggression.

The only instance of popular retaliation against soldierly insolence was exhibited by the Genoese populace, always the hardiest race in Italy, when, in 1746, they rose against the Austrians of Maria Theresa, and, with no other weapons than stones and knives, drove a whole host from their walls.

But, with this single exception, the Italians had laid aside, together with their sword, also the dagger and poison, which, in the seventeenth century, it must be confessed, had become their national weapons. It seemed as if even crime and vice had lost much of its vigour and manliness, and obeyed the enervating influence of the age. The example set by the Bourbon courts of Naples and Parma, and even by that of Savoy, which, however politically allied with Austria—however, for more than two centuries established in Italy, still made a display of transalpine manners—had substituted French levity and frivolity for Spanish pride and vindictiveness. The feline temper

of the Spaniard gave way before the apish nature of the French.

This easy and yielding disposition on the part of their subjects inspired the new rulers with more lenient and benevolent feelings. After the cessation of hostilities in 1748, Italy was governed by monarchs who aspired to the glory of reformers and legislators. The progress and diffusion of knowledge had broken the sceptre of religious tyranny, and declared war to that fanaticism, which, in Italy, had never been a natural growth. The Emperor Joseph II., in Lombardy, and the Grand Duke Peter Leopold, in Tuscany, who began to reign in 1765, had the fame of attempting innovations by far in advance of their age.

The Italians, in fact, had been, for two hundred years, schooled to accept good and evil with passive resignation, such as it pleased the established authority to administer it, or to combat it only by evasion and subterfuge. They seemed to place their felicity in an unconditional abnegation of civil duties, and in a total abstraction from public life.

But if the people had ceased to aspire to the enjoyment of political rights, the wealthier and more enlightened classes had not equally renounced the ambition of intellectual activity. On the contrary, literature and the arts remained as a last resource to men for whom the gallantries of a dissipated life had no longer sufficient attraction. Truly, for a long time, and to a certain extent, literature seemed to share in the general relaxation of the national character; but, by degrees, thought reassumed its wonted ascendancy over matter; it communicated to it that restless life, that necessity of movement and action, that constitute the essential property of its immortal nature. It engendered disgust and repentance, resentment and reaction; it raised man to a consciousness of his own power and dignity; it reformed, reawakened, redeemed.

The rapid advancement of the transalpine nations in every branch of science and literature, no less than in political power and commercial prosperity, had been coeval with the late period of Italian decline. Elated by success, exulting in their vigour and youth, some of them, especially the French, always vain-glorious and boastful, seemed to insult the misfortunes of Italy by their bitter animadversions against the degeneracy of the fallen race—by their blind disavowal of the services it had rendered to the cause of civilisation and humanity—by their unscrupulous defrauda-tion of its early claims to the promotion of the interests of learning.

Thus, the first use that the invaders made of light they had for the most part, derived from Italy, was to reproach that country with what was only the consequence of their own work of destruction. From a state of intellectual dependence, almost bordering on absolute, undiscerning servility, they passed to the opposite extremes of presumption and ingratitude. They dated the history of the modern world from their first invasions of Italy in the sixteenth century, and endeavoured to bury in oblivion those previous epochs, which might have sounded less flattering to their vanity.

The Italians were not so dead to all feelings of national pride as to submit to such flagrant injustice. They fell back on the memorials of the past; they were determined to know themselves; they made a rapid enumeration of their merits, as soldiers, legislators, poets, and thinkers. They wrote their civil and literary history.

That age of political death was but too fatally favourable to their work of historical erudition.

History, such as it had flourished in Italy in the classical age of Guicciardini, was merely a branch of exornative literature. So long as the particulars of a battle were drawn vividly, and with harmony of language; so long as a real or imaginary speech was reported with all the redun-

dance that constituted eloquence in that age, no one took the pains to ascertain its authenticity. Jealous of the purity of their Latin, and, in later times, of their Tuscan languages, the Italian classicists suffered the semi-barbarous chronicles of the middle ages to lie unheeded and forgotten.

Still, the materials for a general compilation of their national history had not been suffered to perish. The patriotism of their municipal governments, the vanity of their noble families, the diligence of their antiquarians, had provided against their dispersion. The precious depositaries of the records of the past seemed to have escaped the ravages of time, of sacking and conflagration, to send down their treasures safely, for the gratification of posterity. There they lay in scrolls, parchments, and manuscripts; huge folios and ponderous quartos piled up—the shelves groaning under their weight, dark, dusty, and silent, like spell-bound warriors, threatening the daring man who should attempt to break the enchantment.

Yet the enchantment was broken, and with luminous success. A hero was found, not enervated even by the seductions of a southern climate, or of an effeminate age; willing to shut himself up in those haunted chambers, abjuring all the ties and charms of social and domestic life, to grapple with the phantoms of the dead—to rescue from them the secret of the past.

Muratori, a giant with a hundred eyes and a hundred hands, one of those antique frames cast in bronze and steel, which would almost induce us to believe in a deterioration of the human race at the present day, left us the result of his labours, which would appear wonderful, even if, like Nestor, he had outlived three generations.

Placed over the Ambrosian library in Milan, and the Estense in Modena; aided by the researches and subventions of the Società Palatina, whose members belonged to the most conspicuous Milanese nobility, he was enabled to

publish nearly all that could then be found on the subject of Italian history. Finally, he attempted to give some order and system to that formless mass, by his original work, "*Annali d'Italia*," in sixteen volumes, which he was said to have written in the almost miraculously short space of one year*.

But, though by far the most industrious and celebrated, Muratori was not the only efficient labourer in laying open the treasures of Italian archives. The same ardour invaded the learned all over the country; and the municipal or provincial records of every town and province were almost contemporaneously brought into light.

Meanwhile, under the protection of the same liberal prince, Francis III. of Modena, Tiraboschi searched the monuments of Italian genius in previous ages, weighed them with an often enlightened, always impartial criticism, plunged into the depth of biographical and bibliographical research with unwearied diligence, and vindicated his country's literary claims with a zeal that won him the respect even of his foreign opponents†.

Equally laborious undertakings were accomplished in reference to the literary productions of every separate district of the country; they were extended to the illustration of every department of science and art.

Men, endowed with brighter minds, in the meantime, strove to associate the weight of erudition with the attractive charms of ornamental style, or the important lessons of political wisdom. The Marquis Maffei, rather a restless and versatile, than an active genius; rather ostentatious than ambitious; embracing with equal eagerness every new

* Ludovico Antonio Muratori, born, A.D. 1672; died, 1750. "*Antiquitates Italicae Medii Ævi*," Milan, 1738-1742, 6 vols. fol.—"*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*," 1723-1751, 25 vols. fol.—"*Annali d'Italia*," 1744-1749, &c.

† Girolamo Tiraboschi, born, A.D. 1731; died, 1794. "*Storia della Letteratura Italiana*," 12 vols. 4to., Modena, 1770-1782.

pursuit that promised excitement or celebrity, and yet not less ardent and persevering in the most arduous undertakings; at once a warrior, a poet, a wit, and a scholar, gave us, in his "*Verona Illustrata*," the model of a work that might prove equally interesting to the most idle no less than the most indefatigable class of readers*.

Pietro Giannone, of Naples, a man of a firm, deep, daring character, after the stamp of republican Italy, aimed not so much to illustrate the historical memorials, and the political institutions of his country, as to demolish the last remnants of that edifice of Catholic superstition that, even on the eve of its downfall, lay still, like a cumbrous ruin, on the way of future Italian emancipation. He declared war against the pope. The unhappy historian was soon made aware that he had too far relied on the patronage of the royal reformers of his age; and that, tottering as it was to its very foundation, the church of Rome had still power to crush an unarmed adversary. Persecuted by a priest-ridden populace at Naples, unable to find a permanent shelter at Vienna, Milan, Modena, and Venice, Giannone emigrated to Geneva, whence, decoyed by the treacherous promises of the agents of government, he ventured into the Piedmontese territory, where he was delivered into the hands of the Inquisition, and died in the dungeons of the citadel of Turin, after a captivity of above twelve years†.

This prevalent spirit of erudite inquiry which taught the Italians to dwell too fondly on the past, if it was beneficial to elevate the national character, inasmuch as it gave that

* Scipione Maffei, born at Verona, A.D. 1675; died, 1755. "*Verona Illustrata*," 1732—"Merope," the best model of Italian tragedy before Alfieri, and marking the epoch of a renovation of taste in that style of composition, Modena, 1713—"La Cereemonia," a comedy—"Della Scienza Cavalleresca," Rome, 1810. Complete works, Venice, 1790. 2 vols.

† Pietro Giannone, born, A.D. 1676; arrested, 1736; died a prisoner, 1748. "*Storia Civile del Regno di Napoli*," 4 vols. 4to., 1723.

people full knowledge of themselves, it had also the effect of engendering those false aristocratic notions by which the Italians have been, and are still, inclined to bring forward the exertions and achievements of their forefathers, as if entitled by them to a life of dissipation and indolence.

Still, the eighteenth century was far from being altogether an idle, retrospective age. The spirit of Galileo lived yet in the schools and academies, and natural sciences continued to flourish with unabated vigour. The Academy del Cimento had been dispersed only ten years after its foundation; but similar institutions sprang up every where at Naples, Milan, and Bologna. In this last university, Morgagni had inherited the fame of Malpighi, which he transmitted to his successors, Mascagni, Spallanzani, Vacca, and Scarpa, down to the present times, when Italy still occupies her high rank among the European nations, in the medical sciences.

In the meanwhile, Lagrange, Piazzzi, and Oriani, raised their names to the level of the greatest mathematicians and astronomers; whilst the example of two learned ladies, Laura Bassi, and Gaetana Agnesi, both professors of mathematics at Bologna, and the popular works of Cagnoli, Algarotti, and Mascheroni, contributed to render the most abstruse studies accessible and attractive to the less active and persevering minds.

But the cultivators of poetry and polite literature were more numerous than the votaries of science. It has been said, perhaps with some reason, that even without its superiority in foregoing ages, Italian literature might stand the parallel of other nations, by its productions of the eighteenth century. A great number of those poets, however, owe their celebrity merely to the close vicinity at which we contemplate them, and are sure to fade in the vastness of space. Faithful to our system, we pass by them in silence, and with indifference, even by such men as Passeroni, and Frugoni, notwithstanding the one hundred

and one long cantos of a poem on the "Life of Cicero," and the nine large volumes of lyrical poems, on which those famous bards had grounded their titles to immortal renown. We hasten to that branch of literature for which Italy will be for ever indebted to the poets of the eighteenth century—the national drama.

The corruption of the Italian theatre, since its earliest revival, had continued during two centuries with an alarming progress. Unable to emancipate themselves from the fetters of classical imitation, the dramatists of the country had gradually yielded the stage to the histrionic extravagances of untutored actors. The worst productions of the Spanish theatre were performed before the Milanese and Neapolitan audiences, disfigured by absurd parodies and caricatures, so as to suit the more lively fancy of our people. Successively some attempts were made to substitute the French for the Spanish taste, in proportion as the manners of the latter nation gave way in Italy before the influence of their more elegant neighbours: so that, at the opening of the eighteenth century, Italy had long been accustomed to depend on foreign nations for its dramatic literature, and suffered Spain and France to reign uncontrolled.

Fortunately, towards the close of the sixteenth century, a new, eminently Italian performance had been attempted with astonishing success in Florence, which was soon not only to supersede those exotic productions in Italy, but which eventually threatened to drive the drama from the stage, all over the world—the melodrama.

I shall not attempt to vindicate the Italians from the charge of sensuality and effeminacy of taste, to which their blind partiality for the opera has given rise. The rapid diffusion of that formless style of performance amply demonstrated how even the sounder judgment of more sober nations might be carried away by the allurements of music.

The opera is, perhaps, much less of an animal enjoy-

ment, than is generally supposed. It has some advantages over the drama, to which rigid censors have not often adverted. The emotion wrought on the human soul by a dramatic performance must be the result of close attention, of absolute, long-continued abstraction. The drama is a tyrant that must absorb all your faculties, and whose chance of success depends on a thorough illusion: a slight reaction of reflection, an instant of preoccupation, of listlessness, or ennui; an ill-timed jest, a fortuitous interruption—and the spell is broken, and the interest slackens.

Not so the opera. Music is no intruder. It asks for no admittance into the sanctuary of the mind; it hovers round its threshold like the minstrel at the entrance of a nuptial apartment; it breaks not, interferes not, with the train of thoughts and feelings; it brings into them a gentle agitation; it fans them, gives them a harmonious, delicate turn; it rouses, soothes, spiritualises them.

The effect of music is immediate. It requires no activity on the part of the mind; it urges not, importunes not; it steals upon us unconsciously, unexpectedly, when our eyes are turned away from the spectacle—when our cares, or sorrows, unfit us for every other mental exertion.

By the invention of a spectacle in which every thing was calculated to give music a boundless ascendancy, the Italians provided for the wants of their own restless and highly sensitive nature, which sought in the theatre the sources of an easy and genial relaxation; and to which a long, silent sitting of above six hours in a playhouse, as the good customers of Covent Garden, or the Haymarket, have the constancy to endure—would be utter misery.

From the earliest revival of the drama, music had always been, in Italy, accessory to theatrical performances.

The choruses of our early tragedies, and especially of pastorals, were generally sung and accompanied with instruments; whilst the interludes were in fact nothing but a mixture of vocal and instrumental music, and ballets.

By a fortunate combination of circumstances, music, which, during the earliest part of the sixteenth century, had been suffered to fall into neglect, was, towards the year 1560, revived by the deep, meditative genius of Palestrina. The revolution accomplished by his masses at the Vatican, extended its influence over the stage no less than the choir. Since that time, dramatic performances were only endured for the sake of their musical accompaniments.

It was in that epoch, that Ottavio Rinuccini, a poet of limited abilities, allied himself with three musicians of note, Peri, Corsi, and Caccini; and, in 1594, exhibited, on the Florentine stage, "*La Daphne*," a pastoral drama, composed in lyrical verses, and wholly adapted to music. The "*Daphne*" was soon followed by the "*Euridice*," which was performed on the celebration of the nuptials of Henry IV. and Mary de Medici, in 1600. The new spectacle was soon carried beyond the Alps, together with its inventor, by the Tuscan princess, whose favourite—some say, lover—the poet was, and was welcomed at every court in Italy and abroad, with unabated enthusiasm, during the whole of the seventeenth century.

But that century was an age of extravagance, and the opera could not be expected to escape its corrupting influence. As poetry had given way to music, so even music yielded its sceptre to the exhibitions of theatrical machinery. The vastness and commodiousness of the Italian playhouses afforded full scope for the most whimsical pranks of the artist's imagination. The opera became a phantasmagory—a jugglery—a sabbath of fairies and demons, of which nothing but an English pantomime can suggest a remote idea.

But the man was born who was to reclaim the opera from the state of degradation into which it had sunk. Apostolo Zeno, born and brought up in Venice—in that town where the opera, as well as every theatrical performance, was most eagerly cultivated, and where it met with the

greatest encouragement—added to a refined poetical taste a wide store of historical erudition, by which he deserved no humble place among the fellow-labourers of Muratori.

He was well versed in the Greek and Roman theatre, and shared in the universal admiration with which the works of Corneille and Racine had been recently received by his countrymen. He framed his operas on the model of the French drama, as far at least as that style of composition admitted of the classical rules, to which the French had submitted themselves*.

Such was the origin of the tragic or heroic melodrama—the opera of Metastasio†.

Metastasio was one of the few men of genius in Italy, arising from the lowest ranks of society. All men are born equal; but their equality ends on their very birthday. The splendour that surrounds the high-born from his cradle, gives his sense of greatness the force of an inborn instinct.

Metastasio was bred up in squalor and indigence. Fortune soon repaired the disadvantages of his nativity, but could not equally destroy the influence of his early education.

He was pure, candid, incorruptible—disinterested and benevolent. His discernment and modesty induced him to decline titles and dignities; his sense of justice prevented him from accepting a splendid fortune, to the detriment of the rightful heir.

But he had no dignity. From his earliest age, when the Senator Gravina took him from his father's shop, to

* Apostolo Zeno, born in Venice, A.D. 1669; Poeta Cesareo at Vienna, 1718–1731; died at Venice, 1750. “*Opere Drammatiche*,” Venice, 1744, 10 vols. 8vo.

† Pietro Trapassi, born at Rome, A.D. 1698; adopted by the Senator Gravina, who called him Metastasio, 1708; appointed Poeta Cesareo at Vienna, by mediation of Zeno, 1729; arrived at Vienna, 1730; died, 1782.

his death at the court of Joseph II., when Pius VI. sent him his benediction, "in articulo mortis,"—he never saw one of fortune's frowns. The energies of his character were never put in requisition.

He loved his friends; was sensible to the devoted attachment of his high-minded Romanina; but he gave way to his feelings only as far as they were for him the source of pleasing emotions. When they bespoke sorrow or danger, he could shut his heart against them at his pleasure. The troubles of his imaginary heroes called tears upon his eyes—the tears of moral epicurism; the evils of real life allowed him to fatten undisturbed. He never experienced misfortune, and, perhaps, never believed in its existence.

If ever selfishness could find its abode in a poet's heart, that heart was Metastasio's.

He assumed the title of *abate*, an indefinable appellation, denoting an amphibious being, half priest, half man, entitled to all the charms, and exempt from all the charges of life. No wonder if he found the privileges of that rank preferable to the titles of knight, baron, and palatine count. He was beloved by the fair sex. Besides the Romanina, his angel at the opening of his career, the beautiful and fiery Gabrielli, the queen of the opera, stole from the homage of the Italian multitude, and ran to Vienna incognito, to have an hour's conversation with him.

The Princess Marianna Pignatelli, a Neapolitan, married at Vienna, was also his intimate for life. He visited her twice a day, whether in fair weather or foul. He possessed, in the highest degree, that love of order and method, that regularity of habits, that shortens our days, and lengthens our years. His muse waited upon him at his bidding like a faithful handmaid. He flattered himself that a man of his sedate and serene temper could live for ever. In fact, whenever the slightest allusion to death, or to evils and disasters, was made before him, a cloud would set on his countenance. Not one hour of his existence had given

him a dislike for what other people call this "vale of tears."

In his eighty-fourth year he preserved all the bloom and vigour of youth. He was a striking illustration of that proverb, that "poets never grow old." No poet, not excepting even Petrarch, ever went to his grave with a greater certainty of the immortality of his name. Metastasio envied, perhaps, the reputation that was to outlive him.

Heaven knows, flattery is an ancient art ; but he carried it so far that he seemed to have given it an air of originality. Adulation had become a second nature in him ; and his incense was equally lavished to monarchs and princes, and to his humblest friends and attendants. As the man was, so was his poetry. Metastasio introduced no material innovation in the melodrama. He adopted the opera such as it had been left by his predecessor, Zeno. The opera is no drama. It knows nothing of dramatic rules, either romantic or classic. It has its own code of laws, and these are strict and inexorable. The number of personages is limited, so is almost the number of scenes and verses. The *tenore*, *prima donna*, and *basso*, are to have each a determined number of airs. These must follow each other in regular succession, according to stage etiquette. Duets, tercets, and choruses, must be equally distributed. An air is usually divided into several parts ; the *adagio*, *andante*, *allegro*, *stretta* or *cabaletta*, according as it is an *aria*, *preghiera*, *cavatina*, *rondò* or *rondoletto*. The poet obeys the *maestro*, the *maestro* depends on the *impresario*, who, in his turn, receives the law from the *prima donna*.

Metastasio resigned himself to the established authorities. The laws that then governed the opera have been since altered, and his dramas have long been banished from the stage.

In a style of composition in which so very little latitude

is left to dramatic art, in which the merit of invention consists in crowding together, in the smallest possible space, the greatest number of romantic incidents, of striking situations, and sudden catastrophes, no matter how much at the expense of probability and common sense, where hardly any leisure is given for the full development of characters, where the warmest scenes are stretched or clipped in obedience to the train of musical cadence, it is evident that the best chances of the poet's success must lie in the fascination of style.

This was the charm of Metastasio. The composition in which he excelled was hardly any thing before him, and nothing ever since. He was the opera.

Bred up in Rome, where the Arcadians had established their chief seat, Metastasio had a string in his heart that answered their softest melodies. His early proficiency in the art of an improvisatore had improved an ear exquisitely organised. To this sense exclusively he trusted his success.

The effect was sure, constant, immediate.

Every human affection seems to assume a gentle, voluptuous mood under his touch. Virtue seems so easy, so seducing and charming! Passions are analysed with such an amusing metaphysical nicety! Love is so enthusiastic and holy! That ideal world is so beautifully rose-coloured!

There reigns all over his pages a languor, a tenderness, a morbidness, that seems like an opiate to transfer the reader into a region of dreams.

Do you wish to know where the secret magic of that poetry lies? Translate any of those verses, and the enchantment vanishes.

The poetry of Metastasio is not of this world, no more than music is like human speech. We must look to another planet than the earth for the realisation of the ideal life he depicted. It is a mixture of pastoral, chival-

rous, heroic, romantic ideas, equally fitting his Assyrian and Roman, and his Chinese and Indian heroes.

Shall I say, with Metastasio's severest censors, that those patterns of ideal perfection, as they are not true to nature, so neither are they consistent with sound morals?—that that continual seduction of easy sentimentalism has an enervating effect on the manly energies of the human soul, which it ought to be the poet's duty to brace up and to temper, so as to fit it to bear through the struggles of life? Shall I, as others have done, call that sickly pathos, that affected language, by the name of poetical Jesuitism?

Who can account for the revolutions in the tastes and ideas of men? Metastasio, the idol of his age, the poet of women; for whose sake French and German ladies undertook the study of Italian; whose verses constituted the text of sensibility and love—Metastasio is setting!

The very spell of his musical language is broken. Since the Italians entertained the first faint hope of their national regeneration, Metastasio has been thrown aside as a dangerous corruptor. His style has been considered undignified, artificial, and monotonous. They fled from him in disgust, as if afraid of being lost in that everlasting sweetness, like a fly drowned in a vase of honey.

The proscribed author might be found still lingering on the ladies' toilet, until modern romances have fairly driven him out of that last refuge, and estranged from him even his compassionate supporters.

It was no slight triumph for Metastasio, and unexampled in the annals of musical poetry, that his operas could bear a cold perusal, and even a dramatic performance.

Still, a great part of their interest was lost when more recent innovations in the musical world unfitted his works for their primitive destination. After his death no limit was put to the encroachments of music. The opera

dwindled to scarcely one-third of its original size. Its verses are no longer dignified by the name of poetry, but are simply called *parole*; the piece is no longer styled either drama or melodrama, but *libretto*. Poets, who have any respect for themselves, have long since ceased to write for the opera; and the public have laid aside all expectation of finding any thing like common sense in that monstrous performance.

But an Italian theatre is something inconceivably anomalous. The opera-house is a place of habitual resort, of fashionable rendezvous. Every box is a diminutive drawing-room; at Milan and Naples, even a banqueting-parlour. In the pit, in the gallery, in the six tiers of boxes, there are other interests at stake than the catastrophe on the stage. Every where there is nodding, and smiling, and flirting, and waving of fans and handkerchiefs: two-thirds at least of the performance are drowned by the murmur of a general conversation, until, occasionally, a burst of applause, or the strokes of the director of the orchestra, announce the entrance of a favourite singer, or the prelude to a popular air; when, as if by a common accord, that confused roar of six thousand voices is instantly hushed; all laughing, coquetting, and iced-champagne-drinking, are broken short; and all the actors in the minor stages submit themselves for five minutes to behave like a well-mannered and intelligent audience.

In such a state of things, it may be understood, that no great justice can be paid to the poet's abilities. The libretto-maker is generally an uneducated wretch, who sells his works for a few crowns apiece. No composer ever showed a more utter disregard for poetry, than the celebrated Rossini. The verses of "Semiramide," "Otello," or "Tancredi," are a disgrace to the literature of the country.

The comic opera, or *opera buffa*, fared generally better, because those vulgar *guasta-mestieri* are not generally

deprived of a certain degree of farcical humour, and because dramatic incongruities are less striking in a style of writing where absurdity is more avowedly the order of the day.

The comic opera, whose origin is coeval with the melodrama—the first having been performed at Venice, in 1597—was brought to perfection by Metastasio's successor at the court of Vienna, Giambattista Casti*.

This bright and fertile, though extravagant and pernicious genius—whose ease, grace, and spontaneousness, were seldom equalled in Italy; whose verses, wherever untainted with the corrupting poison of unbridled licentiousness, have, perhaps, been the model of the happiest stanzas of "Beppo," and "Don Juan,"—only wrote a few dramas during his short sojourn, as a poet-laureate to Joseph II., at Vienna, some of which occasionally reappear, though not without some modification, on the stage.

His fame, however, or his infamy, must rest on those works to which he gave the last finish in France: the "Novelle," and "Animali Parlanti."

Casti was brought up among the seductions of a dissolute age. The gallant adventures of his checkered life, his residence at the court of Catherine II. of Russia, the disorders he witnessed during the disorganising age of the French revolution, had given him the most perverted ideas of human nature. He painted the world as he saw it: the gallant world in his lubric tales; the political, in his apologues. Nothing to him was sacred or pure. He disbelieved virtue, and tore open the veil of modesty, under pretence of unmasking hypocrisy. With a wanton consistency, the octogenarian libertine revelled in the

* Giambattista Casti, born, A.D. 1721; Poeta Cesareo, 1782; left Vienna, 1790; died at Paris, 1804. "Gli Animali Parlanti, Paris, 1802, 3 vols. "Novelle Galanti," 4 vols., Paris, 1793-1804. "Il Poema Tartaro," Milan, 1803. "Poesie Liriche," &c.

remembrance of his juvenile scenes of debauchery. Even on the brink of the grave, to his last day, he laid his rose-woven snares on the path of inexperienced youth, always equally inaccessible to shame or remorse.

But the comic opera has lately fallen into comparative disrepute. The days are long since gone by, when the "Catone" of Metastasio was hissed at Rome, on account of its tragical catastrophe. The Italians are now seized with a contrary mania. Not only the opera, but even the pantomime, has become an exhibition of startling atrocities. Nothing short of the death of the prima donna will satisfy the blood-thirstiness of our audiences. Happy the poet who contrives to bury his heroine alive. The best of Bellini or Donizetti's operas, such as *Norma*, *Beatrice Tenda*, *Parisina*, or *Anna Bolena*, are thus terminated by the executioner's axe. The sublime scenes of Viganò's pantomimes, "*La Vestale*," "*Ines de Castro*," and "*Gabriella di Vergy*," are calculated to harrow up the spectator's imagination with anguish and terror.

The most distinguished writer of these lyrical tragedies, is the advocate Felice Romani, of Genoa, a man of taste and education, chosen by Bellini as his associate in his reform of the melodrama. Bellini, a noble and delicate genius, was the first composer who seemed aware of the importance of the cooperation of poetry. He felt how far the spontaneousness of musical inspiration must depend on its accordance with poetical effusion. He fitted his music to the melody of the verse, and did not, like Rossini or Donizetti, force the verse to the cadence of the music. By the efforts of two kindred minds, Romani and Bellini, the opera was raised to as high a degree of excellence as that performance could attain. "*Norma*," and "*La Sonnambula*," as dramas, are constructed on a more simple and rational plan, display more animation and warmth, and are, on the whole, more interesting productions than some of Metastasio's best models. The style

is equally soft and melodious, but less effeminate and luscious. For the Anacreontic sweetness proper to classical epicurism, Romani substituted the passionate transport, the plaintive melancholy of Romanticism. Only the shortness of the recitation, and the rapidity of dialogue, interfere with the development of characters, and the general movement of action; so that Romani's works will not, like Metastasio's, bear too close an inspection, when stripped of the *prestige* of music and scenic representation.

The success of the opera, though it proved fatal to the interests of dramatic poetry, did not, however, discourage the production of classical works. From the first specimens given by Bibbiena and Ariosto, to the age of Goldoni, no less than five thousand comedies in the ancient style were published, few of which ever appeared, none endured on the stage. They were only performed in private theatres, by academical amateurs. The extemporary farces known by the name of "*Commedia dell'Arte*," had more attraction for the ignorant multitude. The same strolling players were both composers and actors. A poet generally accompanied the wandering company, whose office it was to lay a new plan for the evening; the rest was left to the inventive talent of the actor. The masks, an ancient national contrivance, naturally assigned to each actor his part, and determined his character. The main charm of those formless performances, resulted from the natural promptness of the Italians for extemporaneous exhibition, the alacrity of their satirical humour, and the peculiarities of their argute popular dialects. Such was the state of Italian comedy when the reformer appeared*.

* Carlo Goldoni, born at Venice, A.D. 1707; appointed director of the Italian theatre at Paris, 1761; died, 1793. First edition of his "*Theatre*," Venice, 1753, 10 vols. 8vo. Complete edition, Leghorn, 1788-1791, 31 vols. 8vo. "*Memorie*," 3 vols. 8vo.

The life of Goldoni, such, at least, as results from his memoirs, is but a comedy. It is one of the most amusing episodes in the drama of real life.

Born in Venice, that city of carnival, surrounded from his boyhood with all the noise and bustle of his grandfather's private theatricals; running away from college in his fourteenth year, to join a troop of strolling players; expelled for misdemeanour at the university, for his indulgence in his satirical genius; by turns, seized with fits of religious compunction, and resolving to repair to a Franciscan convent, and again giving way before worldly temptations; shifting his residence from town to town with vagrant restlessness; cheated, now by cowed, now by mustachioed swindlers, now by painted stage-princesses; a lawyer, a physician, a chancellor in a court of law, an encyclopædical adventurer; to-day an ambassador's guest, to-morrow a penniless pedestrian, but never deserted by his appetite, by his good humour and luck; always reckless of the future. He had but too ample opportunities of making his apprenticeship in the world, ere he seriously set himself about representing it on the stage.

It was only in his fortieth year, that, encouraged by the success of his first essays, he established himself in his native town, and proceeded to the accomplishment of his scheme of dramatic reform.

His task was fraught with uncommon difficulties. The actors were attached to a system which demanded of them rather readiness of wit and imagination, than laborious preparation.

They had imported a few Spanish extravagances, in which their coarse scurrilities were blended with supernatural apparitions. They had a certain number of set speeches, which they knew how to insert in every play. The harlequins and pantaloons could not be prevailed upon to part with their masks, nor the public with their ghosts and goblins. "None of your staid comedies," said

they, "will ever go through as many representations as the famous 'Convitato di Pietra.'"

Goldoni could not combat prejudice by an open attack: he came to a compact with it. He flattered the public taste until he had secured its suffrage; he yielded to his actors until he had become necessary to them; the mask gradually dropped from their faces; the incidents of every day's life were substituted for the wild pranks of supernatural jugglery; and the stage was once more trodden by living and breathing personages, whose errors and oddities were intended as a salutary mirror to the beholders.

Goldoni attempted this innovation at his full cost and peril. He found himself obliged to make up for the comparative tameness of his performances by their endless variety. During the year 1750, he supplied the theatre of St. Luke with sixteen new comedies, all written in the space of a twelvemonth. They are among his best productions, and were received with unanimous acclamation. His health suffered from that intense exertion, and he felt the consequences of it during the rest of his life. By the labours of that, and a few following years, however, his endeavours were crowned with complete success.

Over-rated as the productions of Goldoni may be said to have been by his countrymen, they have, however, been rather too hastily and indiscriminately censured abroad. The best of his comedies are still unknown ground for foreign critics. We never meet with any attempt at a rational examination of any but the worst of them, such as "*La Bottega del Caffè*," "*Il Servitor di due Padroni*," and other such premature, though at the time of their performance highly successful essays, in which efforts, poor Goldoni, while he gradually endeavoured to reform the bad taste of his contemporaries, was yet obliged to submit to it. These are also the first that are given to foreigners as his "*Commedie Scelte*." Sismondi, from whose eyes the spectacles of criticism seem invariably to fall,

whenever he loses sight of his faithful escort, Ginguené, has grounded his judgment merely on a few of these primitive performances.

Goldoni's masterpieces in the Venetian dialect, such as "Le Donne Gelose," "I Rusteghi," "Le Baruffe Chiozzotte," and perhaps twenty others, which are a living picture of low life in that part of Italy, where national manners preserved to the last their most striking peculiarities—a picture of Venice—no longer the bride of the ocean, no longer the arbiter of the destiny of nations, but burying the disgrace of its impending downfall in the ebriety of perpetual bacchanals—those comedies are still, on account of the language, works of very difficult access even to persons conversant with Italian. The recent reaction in favour of Goldoni, brought about especially by the exertions of Augusto Bon and his excellent company, has rendered the Venetian dialect familiar to Italian ears, and given it a peculiar charm in the different provinces; but a French or German critic must not be expected to relish Goldoni's idioms any more than an Italian could appreciate the atticisms of Sam Weller.

But more attention ought, at least, to have been paid to the "Cavaliere e la Dama," "La Dama Prudente," and other comedies, in which Goldoni gave so lively a portraiture of the manners of the higher classes, such as they were in the idle and thoughtless period that preceded the French revolution, with all their intrigues and mysteries of ancient Italian *cicisbeism*.

This artificial system of fashionable demoralisation, however the Italians may justly have borne the ridicule attached to it, was not, in its origin, a production of indigenous growth. Jealousy was the main trait of the Italian character. "Chi ama teme" was one of our earliest proverbs. The first pang of jealousy makes the Italian aware of the existence of love. Hence, notwithstanding the pre

cocious development of civilisation in Italy, women in republican times were watched over with anxious care; and an Italian house was beset with all the gloom and loneliness of an eastern harem. This suspicious mood increased in days of tyranny, when the peaceful citizen trembled for all that he held dear in life. It assumed still darker colours under the influence of the Spaniards, among whom that system of domestic tyranny was the natural result of their Moorish descent: it was blended with the vindictive ferocity prevailing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the dagger and poison stood as guarantees for conjugal fidelity.

The transalpine nations, especially the French, combated Italian suspiciousness with the irresistible weapon of ridicule. Locks and bars gave way before the overpowering sovereignty of fashion. Enterprising gallantry forced its way into the inmost recess of the domestic sanctuary.

But among the Italians—a southern people—an extreme can only be cured by falling into the opposite. No sooner were they made ashamed of their jealousy, than they put no limits to their eagerness in disavowing and discountenancing it. To betray any symptom of that besetting complaint, became an unpardonable offence. There was no ordeal to which the martyr of fashion would not submit, rather than expose himself to the raillery of the world. The possessor of a handsome wife was not only bound to produce her, but to launch her into the vortex of a corrupt society. He gave up his rights and privileges, and, according to all appearances, allowed her to become another man's property.

That man was the *cicisbeo* or *cavalier servente*.

The incautiousness of young brides recently issuing from the innocence of their claustral education, the audacity of unprincipled libertines, who sought, in the wanton boastings of amorous conquest, an excitement that political

or commercial enterprise no longer afforded, must undoubtedly have rendered that anomalous intercourse, in many instances, dangerous and fatal.

Still the very frivolousness of that more giddy than guilty age had power to prevent that foolish practice from being carried to the utmost extremities. Goldoni, whose fault was rather to have overcharged than spared the vices of society, described *cicisbeism* only as an absurd and troublesome code of etiquette, by no means interfering with the sanctity of private affections. The limits between the rights of the real and the mock husband are clearly defined, and the shafts of the poet's humour are less frequently aimed at the heroic endurance of the former, than the servile submissiveness of the latter. Dutiful wives are represented as deeply impressed with the responsibility devolving upon them, from the implicit confidence of their lords. They start back with horror and disgust, whenever the assiduity of their servente assumes the character of impertinent courtship. *Cicisbeism* might afford opportunities, perhaps even encouragement, but no sanction to vice.

Nevertheless, it was an imprudent, blamable custom; and we must be thankful to Heaven, that we have lived to see it universally discountenanced. The ridicule thrown upon its rites and institutions by Goldoni had no little influence in that salutary revolution. But, more lately, *cicisbeism* gave way before the elaborate and bitter invective of the true-hearted patriot, Parini, whose galling satire, "*Il Giorno*," so forcibly contributed to rouse from their apathy the indolent Milanese nobility of sixty years since*.

* Giuseppe Parini, born at Bosisio, A.D. 1729; a tutor with some noble Milanese families, 1752. "*Il Mattino, il Mezzogiorno, il Vespro e la Notte*," Milan, 1801. Professor of Italian Literature at Milan, and editor of the "*Gazetta Milanese*," under the Austrian government; member of the municipal government during the French occupation,

Nothing but the ungenerous prepossessions of ignorant travellers can detect even the traces of cicisbeism in Italy

1787. The most noble-minded man of his times. Died, poor, blind, and neglected, 1799. Complete works, Milan, 1801.

We thought we might please the lovers of Italian literature by a quotation from this most elaborate but most impressive of Italian poets. He is said to have been for more than forty years busy with his poem, "Il Giorno," which, however, scarcely amounts to two thousand lines. The following extract is taken from the very opening of the fourth division of the poem, and is looked upon as one of the best specimens of imitative description. We have attempted, in our English version, as far as the nature of a northern language would allow it, to render the long, drawling vowels by which the poet endeavoured to reproduce such solemn and dismal sounds as reach the ear in a deep night, mellowed by distance, and blended into each other.

LA NOTTE.

Già di tenebre involta e di perigli
Sola, squallida, mesta, alto sedevi
Sulla timida terra. Il debil raggio
Delle stelle remote e dei pianeti
Che nel silenzio camminando vanno
Rompea gli orrori tuoi sol quanto è d'uopo
Per sentir li vieppiù. Terribil ombra
Giganteggiando sì vedea salire
Su per le case e su per l'alte torri
Di teschi antichi seminate al piede
E lievi dal terreno e smorte fiamme
Di su di giù vagavano per l'aere
Orribilmente tacito ed opaco.
E upupe e gufi e mostri avversi al sole
Svolazzavan per essa e con ferali
Stridi recavan miserandi auguri
E al sospettoso adultero che lento
Col cappel sulle ciglia e tutto avvolto
Nel mantel se ne già coll' armi ascose
Colpièno il core e lo strigean d'affanno.

E fama è ancor che pallide fantasime
Lungo le mura dei deserti tetti
Spargean lungo acutissimo lamento,
Cui di lontan per entro al vasto buio
I cani rispondevano ululando.

in our days. Degraded woman is not there, any more than any where else, a rare spectacle. But to say that vice is ostentatiously exhibited at Milan or Turin, free from all censure of public opinion ; to say that a *cicisbeo* is still a *sine qua non* among the written articles of a marriage contract, must strike an Italian, to say the least, as an unwarrantable anachronism.

But between Goldoni's age and the present time a most eventful period of years intervened. Goldoni left Italy in 1761, eight-and-twenty years before the French revolution. Even then, however, society was not altogether as bad as

NIGHT IN OLDEN TIMES.

Whilome with darkness and with peril fraught,
 Deep, dreary, desolate, thou sat'st enthroned
 Upon the o'erawed Earth. The far-off beam
 Of blood-red planet and pale-twinkling star,
 Stealing their march along their silent path,
 Broke through the horrors of thy dismal gloom
 To make it palpable. Thy giant shade
 Strode over mansions, over turrets high,
 With bleaching skulls thick-strewn beneath. The glare
 Of ghastly flames shot up from noisome grounds,
 Flickering and fluttering as they sailed aloft
 Into the desert air. And impure owls,
 And monsters weird that shrink from daylight's bliss,
 Flapped on that genial element their wings,
 And rent it keenly with their boding shrieks,
 That smote the nightly wanderer on his way ;
 Smote him with dread and anguish to the heart,
 As on ill thoughts intent, deep in the folds
 Of his dark cloak, his hat slouched on his brow,
 His hand tight on the hilt, he skulked along.

Nay, more ! uprising from dismantled roofs,
 Through chinks and crannies of old mouldering walls,
 The flitting phantoms of uneasy souls
 Poured forth their hell-pangs in long lingering groans,
 Whereat the watch-hounds, startled from their lairs,
 From far and wide chimed in with yells and howls.

he painted it. His life was spent among actors and adventurers. His amours were with stage heroines; he had but rare opportunities of an intimate intercourse with the best classes. Like one of our modern tourists, he travelled through, but had hardly leisure to inspect the world: he saw it through the glare of the stage lights. His heroes too often remind us of the green-room. Their faded lineaments are apparent through the meretricious varnish of their theatrical paint. Neither was the poet's own character such as to raise him to the conception of a *beau-ideal* of moral worth. The sport of fortune during his lifetime, he had acquired all the apathy and recklessness of a confirmed fatalist. "All the world's a stage," was his device. As he gave little or no room to feeling in his bosom, so did he equally exclude it from his plays. He seemed to be born to laugh at the follies and miseries of mankind, and this he understood to be the sole and exclusive office of comedy.

Of this task he admirably acquitted himself. His fertile, inexhaustible, original humour; the rapidity and spontaneousness of his dialogue; the variety and eccentricity of his characters; his truly comic vein, stand unrivalled in Italy. He furnished the Italian theatre with more than one hundred and twenty comedies; which, together with a few written by his contemporary, the Marquis Albergati Capacelli, and those of his more recent imitators, the elegant, though rather cold and infecund Nota, the more staid but also more profound De Rossi, and the wild and oftentimes licentious Giraud, constitute the best models of what is now distinguished by the appellation of "*Commedia di Carattere*," the comedy of the genuine Italian school.

But the triumph of Goldoni has not been always equally assured. Even in the height of his success, he met with a dangerous rival in Count Carlo Gozzi, a Venetian of bright

inventive genius ; one of those light-hearted patricians of the *Poco-curante* school, for whom literature and the fine arts were rather a pastime than a serious employment.

Provoked by some of Goldoni's indignant remarks, Gozzi, who had always regretted the downfall of the ancient national "*Commedia dell'Arte*," undertook to revive it before the very eyes of the reformer, who flattered himself to have banished it without return.

Selecting his subject from the fairy tales in which the Venetians delighted, the Count dazzled his audience with the exhibition of fantastic productions, in which the enchantments of the oriental genii, the thousand and one extravagances of the "*Arabian Nights' Entertainments*," were brought to the aid of the buffooneries of the ancient popular farces. The "*Love of the Three Oranges*," the "*Blue Monster*," the "*Lady Bird*," and other such outlandish performances, operated an ephemeral reaction in favour of the old Italian school.

It was as if "*Midsummer Night's Dream*" had entered into competition with the "*Merry Wives of Windsor*." Goldoni, disheartened by what he called the blindness and ingratitude of his countrymen, embittered also by the personal attacks of his rival's satires, left Venice in disgust and despondency, and repaired to France, where new success attended him on a foreign stage.

He died at Paris, during the reign of terror, in 1793.

Gozzi, left master of the battle-field, did not, however, long enjoy his triumph. The charm attached to his magic performances was broken when some of his best actors deserted him. His plays never reappeared either at Venice or any where else in Italy, and sank into utter oblivion, until they were recently resuscitated in Germany.

The "*Commedia Goldoniana*" having thus once more superseded the "*Commedia dell'Arte*," and prevailed against the "*Fiabe*" of Gozzi, equally succeeded, in later times, to drive from the stage the sentimental comedy,

"Commedia Piagnolosa,"—derived from French and English romances of the worst school; the philosophical comedy, or "Commedia Morale,"—consisting in apt illustrations of the *philanthropic* school of Voltaire and Rousseau; the "Commedia Romantica," imitated from the German, and filling the stage with horrors, with tears and groans; and finally the "Commedia d'Intrigo," of which Camillo Federici was the first master, and in which the protagonist is invariably a duke or an emperor travelling incognito, to surprise his ministers or his subjects *in flagrante delicto*, and performing the duties of an amateur police.

All these different schools have had their day. The Italians, who can patiently listen to the same opera for a whole season, betray an inexhaustible thirst for variety in the drama. No dramatic performance can go through more than three successive representations; and as the original "Repertorio" would be easily exhausted, poets and actors have recourse to frequent translations, especially from the French theatre. There is scarcely an example of any of Scribe's farces and vaudevilles rising into notoriety in Paris, without being forthwith "*tradotte e ridotte*" for the Italian stage.

The actor's trade in Italy, as well as the interests of the drama, in consequence of the all-absorbing prevalence of the opera, are in a very precarious condition. The few wandering companies, except such as are entertained by royal patronage, are every day decreasing in number and importance, and some of them reduced to the last stage of penury. Dramatic poets would fare still worse, if there were any longer in Italy persons exclusively following that calling. I know of no instance, since the time of Goldoni, in which an author's labours received any better fees than the popular applause, which must be accepted as a pledge of the remuneration of posterity.

The great number of private theatricals, however, and

the zeal of the *dilettanti* of every class, supply the deficiency of good companies: the talent of declamation is reckoned among the essential accomplishments of gentlemanly education.

The "Commedia dell'Arte" has found its last refuge in the little theatres of San Carlino in Naples, Girolamo in Turin, Stenterello in Florence, and other similar contrivances in every town. These formless and grotesque extemporaneous performances, generally in the popular dialects, though seldom written, and never printed, might afford considerable interest to foreign critics as specimens of a national amusement, which has survived every phasis of ancient and modern civilisation.

As of all branches of literature the theatre is the one that most essentially belongs to the nation, and admits least of foreign imitation; the Italians, after seeking for excitement in the works of French and German dramatists, after a few ephemeral aberrations of taste, have always reverted, and are sure unanimously and enthusiastically to return to their "gran Goldoni."

Italy has behaved towards her great comic poet, as Rosaura in his "Vedova Scaltra," who, after having flirted with English, French, and Spanish admirers, gives her preference to her less rich, less elegant, less ostentatious, but more warm-hearted Italian lover.

If Goldoni and the Italian comedy are still almost entirely unknown, Alfieri, though a more familiar name, can be hardly said to have been more justly appreciated abroad. Literature is the inalienable property of a nation. Language remains as a last moral barrier when every other natural or artificial line of demarcation is broken. A work of genius is the emanation of a whole age and country: it obeys the laws of national taste, which are perpetually fluctuating in accordance with local circumstances and social conventions. We cannot flatter ourselves to have fully appreciated the merits of a foreign work, until we

have, by means of powerful abstraction, worked ourselves up to that state of feeling by which the author was actuated, until we have raised ourselves to his level, and identified ourselves with him.

Down to the period of the French revolution, the chaste and symmetrical type of Greco-Latin classicism had established its absolute sway over Europe. Those were the days when Racine and Voltaire held an exclusive possession of the stage; when Addison's "Cato" was looked upon as the masterpiece of English tragedy.

Our age has witnessed a most astonishing reaction. The northern nations have asserted their independence in letters and arts, as they had long since in religion and politics; they have spurned the models before which they had been taught to bow in awe and veneration; they have set up their romantic school, and broken the fetters of what had certainly become an intolerable despotism of pedantry.

The Germanic element has gained such a universal ascendancy, as to exert its sway even over those countries where classicism seemed indigenous. The Italians have in their turn become imitators; and, as such a state of things must appear to them novel and unnatural, their literature has fallen into that state of titubation and uncertainty, which is perhaps only the consequence of a state of transition, but which has been too hastily set down as absolute stagnation and irrevocable death.

But when we think of Alfieri we must bring ourselves back to his age; we must for a moment enter into his classical views. Alfieri was in Italy the last of classics; and happy was it for that school, that it could, at its close, shed so dazzling a light as to shroud its downfall in his glory, and trouble, for a long while, with jealous anxiety, the triumph of its hyperborean rival—the romantic school.

When we number the greatest tragedian of Italy among the classics, we consider him only in regard to the form

and style of his dramas, not to the spirit that dictated them. Properly speaking, he belonged to no school, and founded none. He stands by himself, the man of all ages, the man of no age. Whatever might be the shape which his education, or the antique cast of his genius led him to prefer in his productions, no poet ever contributed more powerfully to the reformation of the character of his countrymen. For that object he only needed to throw before them the model of his own character. It mattered little whether it was drawn with the pencil, or carved with the chisel; whether it was wrapped up in the Roman gown of Brutus, or in the Florentine cassock of Raimondo de Pazzi.

Alfieri's character was an anomaly in his age. Notwithstanding some symptoms of boldness and energy of mind shown by some of his contemporaries, or his immediate predecessors, such as Giannone or Parini, still the regeneration of the Italian character was yet merely intellectual and individual; and Alfieri was born of that class which was the last to feel its redeeming influence. He belonged to a nobility used to make day of night, and night of day; to divide their hours between the prince's antechamber and the boudoir of the reigning beauty; to waste their energies in a life of insolence, idleness, and unlawful excitement.

Alfieri's character is portrayed in his biography; two volumes written in a concise, vigorous, and disdainful style, such as Italy had not been for a long time accustomed to. It is the most striking likeness that any artist ever left of himself*.

* Count Vittorio Alfieri da Asti, born, January 17, A.D. 1749; his first travels, 1767; settled at Turin, 1772-75. "*Cleopatra*," acted, 1776; "*Saul*," written, 1782; established in Paris with the Countess of Albany, 1787-1790; first edition of his works, 1790; wrote his memoirs, 1790; narrow escape from the French mob at Paris, 1792, August 18; settled at Florence till his death; began his study of Greek, 1795; died, October 8, 1803.

It was by a strange chance that Goldoni and Alfieri have both in their memoirs unveiled to our curiosity the wonderful ways by which Heaven fitted them to their mission, revealing to the mind the secret working of the mind. The first taught us how the fancy of a comic poet is shaped; the last, how the soul of a tragedian is tempered.

The life of Alfieri is an eminently moral book; in so far, at least, as it represents a mind growing up, abandoned to itself, unknown, unconscious, stagnating in ignorance and inertia almost to the end of youth, then roused all at once by a sudden start, and travelling on an untrodden path, with a confidence in its own forces, and with a firmness of purpose, which would be controlled by no obstacle.

Alfieri was left an orphan from his childhood. At the end of his minority he was thrown alone into the world, with a large fortune—with no safeguard but the loose ideas of honour prevailing at the time, and a proud mind, that seemed, as if unaware, to aim at great undertakings, and panted for action in a different sphere of life.

Among his dissipations, a thought haunted him—a vague regret for the time he had lost, an anxious longing for fame, which sickened him of his juvenile pleasures, and allowed him no rest.

Penetrated with the utter impossibility of distinguishing himself by immediate action in that age, Alfieri, like many other noblemen of his country, was forced to throw himself as a last resource on literature.

But he had lofty ideas of its duties and influence: he had exalted notions of the dignity of man—an ardent, though a vague and exaggerated love of liberty, and of the manly virtues which it is wont to foster. He felt that of all branches of literature the theatre had the most immediate effect on the illiterate mass of the people. He invaded the stage. He drove from it Metastasio and his effemi-

nate heroes. He substituted dramatic for melodic poetry; manly passions for enervate affections; ideas for sounds. He wished to effect upon his contemporaries that revolution which his own soul had undergone: he wished to rouse them, to wake them from their long lethargy of servitude, to see them thinking, willing, striving, resisting.

To a man that wrote, actuated by such feelings, the mere form was nothing. It was only at the age of twenty-nine, that, tormented by that disease of noble minds, fame, and grounding his hopes on what he calls his "determined, obstinate, iron will," he formed the resolution to be a tragic poet, and began his poetical career by resuming his long-abandoned studies from the very elements of grammar.

He had no dramatic models before him but Corneille and Racine, to which he added a very imperfect knowledge of the ancient classics. For Shakspeare he indeed evinced an indefinable admiration. He felt overawed by the extraordinary powers, but was deterred and distracted by the eccentric flights of that sovereign fancy. The day of Shakspeare had not yet dawned. The great crisis of romanticism was not mature; nor was it in Alfieri's power to foresee it.

When the great political and literary catastrophe had finally arrived; when the Jacobine legions invaded every thing; when the romantic taste gained ground around him, he knew nothing, heard nothing of it. Many years since he had retired from the stage of the world; his mission was fulfilled, and he hastened to immortality, unconscious of the storms that thickened around him.

We must look upon Alfieri, not as the predecessor or contemporary of Goëthe and Schiller, but as the successor of Racine and Metastasio. It is only with the prosy *tirades* of the former, and the honeyed *recitativi* of the latter, that the iron framework of the fierce *Astigliano* can be fairly compared.

With the exception of Maffei's "Merope," a gentle and correct, but still, in my opinion, languid performance, the French tragedians, when Alfieri appeared, were believed to have the entire possession of the stage. Alfieri took upon himself the task of dethroning them, and accomplished it. For that purpose, he chose to beat them at their own weapons. He forced his haughty, insubordinate nature into the fetters of classical rules, and carried them to a superstitious extreme: he made himself a rigid observer of dramatic unity, rejected all accessory ornament, all episodical incidents, and gave to the stage his drama, solemn and severe; a bare, single, rapid, intense exhibition of horror and pity, never allowing the interest to stray, the attention to flag, or the excitement to cool.

Alfieri forgot, or, perhaps, wilfully neglected the precept of Horace, "*ut pictura poesis.*" He was a sculptor poet. Sculpture works for eternity; it seems to refuse itself to all ornament and variety; it is indifferent to local costumes and habits; it considers its figures in the abstract, independent of light and shade; but its powers are limited, its materials are stone, rigid and rough, unbending, unmalleable, colourless.

Alfieri's poetry was sculpture. His tragedies are only a group of four or five statues; his characters are figures of marble, incorruptible, everlasting; but not flesh, nothing like flesh, having nothing of its freshness and hue.

He describes no scene. Those statues stand by themselves, isolated on their pedestals, on a vacant ideal stage, without background, without contrast of landscape or scenery; all wrapped in their heroic mantles; all moving, breathing statues perhaps, still nothing but statues.

Wherever be the scene, whoever the hero, it is always the poet that speaks. It is always his noble, indomitable soul reproduced under various shapes; it is always one and the same object pursued under different points of view, but to which every other view is subservient. The

struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed; the genii of good and evil have waged an eternal war in his scenes. Philip, Creon, Gomez, Appius, and Cosmo de Medici, can equally answer his purposes as the agents of crime. Don Carlos, Antigone, Perez, Icilius, and Don Garzia, are indifferently chosen to stand forth as the champions of virtue.

But Alfieri deals too freely in horrors and atrocities. The passions he seems to delight in are jealousy and revenge. An inexorable tormentor, he allows the heart not an instant of ease; he presses heavier and heavier upon it; he severs fibre from fibre; he tears it asunder. An awful obscurity pervades the whole drama, and gives it all the sublimity of mysticism. Among the darkest conceptions of the human mind, there is nothing like his Philip of Spain. I remember to have risen from my seat after its performance, oppressed and exhausted, my eyes dizzy, my temples throbbing and aching.

But it would be an error to believe that Alfieri could not or did not attempt the most tender pathetic, that he could give no utterance to the softest emotions. I know of no model of conjugal love and solicitude to match his lovely Bianca de Pazzi. The meeting of Virginius and his family on the threshold of his house has been written in tears—the tears of Alfieri; and such short, abrupt episodes, breaking on a sudden through that gloomy severity, as if to relieve us from our intense agitation, have all the refreshing effect of a summer shower.

But besides these fugitive passages, there is one at least among his tragedies in favour of which exception should be made, even in the general sentence that has been passed against Alfieri, by the partisans of romanticism.

“Saul” is certainly no classical performance. The character of that first monarch of Israel is not, indeed, a statue, or bust, but as noble a picture as art could ever contrive. It is, in truth, the tallest and bravest of the

warriors of the twelve tribes ; a stately figure bent by age, and overcome by sorrow ; the martyr of restless remorse ; the victim of a relentless vengeance ; the old oak, pride of the forest, blasted by the lightning of Heaven.

It is an exquisite anatomy of melancholy ; and the rapid intensity which it derives from its unity of action adds not a little to its prompt and immediate effect.

The fame of Alfieri for a long while precluded the way to tragical writing in Italy. The style of his tragedies seemed equally to refuse itself to all imitation, and to discourage all spirit of innovation. His authority has been fatal to dramatic art.

Those fetters with which he was pleased to shackle his powerful imagination would crush and palsy any intellect of a weaker frame, as Thersites would have been stifled under the armour of Achilles.

The followers of his school—Monti, who endeavoured to soften, and Foscolo, who strove to exaggerate the harshness and conciseness of their model—have equally perished in the attempt.

Alfieri did not, could not, in his age, supply Italy with a real model for tragedy.

But he had built an edifice of steel and adamant, on which the gratitude and veneration of his countrymen had written : “ALFIERI RAISED IT : BEWARE HOW YOU TOUCH IT !”

CHAPTER III.

NAPOLEON.

Reforms of the Princes of the Age of Leopold of Tuscany—Improved Character of Literature—Vico, Beccaria, &c.—State of Men's Minds at the Epoch of the French Invasion—A rapid View of Events under the Republican and Imperial Governments—State of Literature under Napoleon—Monti, Foscolo, and Pindemonte—Botta.

THE princes into whose hands the destinies of Italy had been abandoned, by the ultimatum of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 1748, were all more or less equally employed in the promotion of public welfare.

Charles III. of Bourbon, at Naples, and the two brothers, Joseph II. of Austria, and Peter Leopold of Tuscany, with a disinterested and enlightened zeal laboured at a general amelioration in the condition of the people; and some attempts were even made at a gradual reform of civil and religious institutions.

These salutary innovations, however, aimed no higher than at a universal increase and equitable distribution of material prosperity. Liberal encouragement was granted to agriculture, commerce, and trade. Marshes were drained, roads opened, harbours cleared. Wisdom and clemency presided over the councils of those benevolent legislators. The well-being of the people was the avowed object of all their measures.

Only it may be permitted to inquire how far these

reforms influenced the moral improvement of the Italian nation.

Our ancient republicans loved their institutions not so much in proportion to the amount of happiness and security which they afforded to the mass, as to the share that each individual was allowed to take in the sovereignty of the state. Liberty was for them rather an essential element of life than a source of enjoyment. Public spirit was the main spring which determined all private exertion.

Freedom they understood to be the identification of every citizen with the state.

Hence patriotism gradually prevailed over love of liberty. Every one was vitally interested in the advancement of his country's greatness and power, endangered his life and property, sacrificed his domestic comforts, and even submitted to vexatious and arbitrary laws, whenever the safety of the republic seemed to require it.

In their eagerness to assert the supremacy of their native state they acceded to the concentration of power into one or a few hands, and gave rise to the establishment of oligarchy and despotism.

But those patricians and tyrants still constituted the state; and although the sovereignty with which they had been provisionally invested became, in their hands, oppressive and permanent, yet those national governments were looked upon with devotion and pride, as the emanation of popular will and the depositaries of popular power. They were tyrants of the people's own making.

On the other hand the chiefs of the state assumed rather the ducal or imperial than the royal power. Theirs was a military more than a civil government. They were the protectors and dictators of the republic; and the municipal and jurisdictional authority was left in the hands of magistrates who still preserved the titles and insignia of republican times.

Hence the improvidence and inconsistency of those rulers who had to struggle against the privileges of every petty community, against the remnants of feudal and ecclesiastical authority, and never had sufficient energy, or never deemed it wise and safe, to bring their states under a uniform system of civil organisation.

But Italy had now passed under the rule of princes, on whom the sanction of all the powers of Europe seemed to have conferred the rights of undisputed legitimacy; kings or dukes that reigned "by the grace of God," and owed nothing to men; who had no longer any occasion to fear or any necessity to manage their subjects; for whom Louis XIV., of France, was the model of princes; for whom the utmost perfection of monarchical government consisted in an absolute equalisation and centralisation of powers.

Thus the innovations of Peter Leopold and the princes his contemporaries—whatever may be said in their praise—only aimed at a thorough consolidation of despotism.

The measures by which the emperor, the grand duke, and the Bourbons, emancipated their states from the temporal control of the papal see; the emanation of a uniform code of laws; the abolition of private jurisdiction; the reforms introduced in the management of the public revenues—every decree they enacted had, in fact, no other tendency than to bring the reins of the state exclusively, unconditionally, into their hands.

With the exception of his ruinous wars, they had effected in Italy, in 1789, that revolution which Louis XIV. had accomplished in France nearly a century before.

The Italians were far from opposing this new order of things: in the first place, because they were long since accustomed to passive obedience; then, because they felt that their superannuated institutions, being no longer in keeping with their present circumstances, had become a real evil, and their suppression afforded at least a tem-

porary relief; and also, because the reformers seemed really actuated by noble and generous motives; and power became, in their hands, an instrument of real good.

The monarch's throne was accessible to the meanest of his subjects. The prince himself visited incognito the humble dwelling of the poor. But the nation, as a body, was never consulted, never allowed to utter its grievances. One mind alone examined, foresaw, and provided. To the rest nothing was left but to enjoy, to applaud, and to bless.

There are nations to whom despotism, in the hands of a wise and clement sovereign, is the *ne plus ultra* of civil felicity.

But no royal beneficence can reconcile the Italians to an absolute master.

Under these pastoral governments the people were better fed, more leniently and equitably shorn; but they were, more than ever, brought to the condition of sheep.

But those whom loftiness of genius or manliness of character raised above the common level of the brutified multitude, among whom some sparks of the ancient republican spirit still survived, to whom the name of Italy conveyed vague but glorious and imperishable reminiscences, did not, without reluctance, submit.

They hated their despots "*et dona ferentes.*" They scorned to receive as a boon what they were entitled to claim as a right, and endured the present only as a stepping-stone to a new and a better order of things.

From the earliest beginning of the eighteenth century to the year 1789 intellectual life had advanced with rapid development. The debates of the Neapolitan, Tuscan, and Austrian governments, with the papal see, had brought about the enfranchisement of science and literature. The suppression of the Jesuits had reawakened the ardour of the Italian universities, and given a new impulse to the activity of the press. The philanthropic measures of the

royal reformers called forth the strictures of the learned. The theories of political and legislative administration were warmly, and, with the exception of Venice, to a certain extent, also freely discussed. At Naples especially, where the study of law absorbed all capacities, the most cultivated minds were kept in a state of continual ferment.

There flourished in that city a school of profound but daring philosophers, the descendants of Telesio and Campanella, engaged in such pursuits as, by their gravity and abstruseness, might seem incompatible with the gaiety and voluptuousness of that gifted land, and the habitual light-heartedness of its inhabitants.

Even before Naples had been providentially freed from the yoke of Spanish and Austrian viceroys, there lived within its walls, inglorious and poor, but happily secure in his obscurity and indigence—the man to whom posterity awarded the proud title of the Dante of philosophy—Vico*.

His mind was, in fact, framed after the model of the father of Italian poetry, from whose mystic cantos he had drawn the first elements of that vast and recondite knowledge, which seemed to harass and fatigue his understanding, like the fatidical inspiration which wrought within the soul of ancient prophets.

The bold and gigantic ideas by which Italian philosophy was finally emancipated from the doctrines of Cartesianism, and of which Vico had only sown the germs in his "*Scienza Nuova*," a work, lofty even to inaccessibility, received full development in the writings of his successor—Genovesi†.

Under the influence of this amiable philosopher the abstractions of metaphysical inquiry were made subservient

* Giambattista Vico, born, A.D. 1670; died, 1744. "*Principii di Scienza Nuova, d'intorno alla Comune Natura delle Nazioni*."

† Antonio Genovesi, born at Salerno, A.D. 1712; died, 1769.

to the interests of the state. Genovesi himself occupied the chair of political economy, which had been first opened in Naples, by private munificence, in 1754. Twelve years later a similar institution was founded at Milan; and the title of professor of economical sciences was given to a still greater man—Cesare Beccaria*.

The name of Beccaria was already well known throughout Europe, as that of the reformer of criminal legislation. He was the greatest of a large number of champions of humanity, who had established themselves at Milan, under the patronage or tolerance of the Count of Firmian, the lieutenant of Maria Theresa and her son, and who were rapidly undermining the ancient edifice that had been long miscalled social order in Italy.

The remains of feudal barbarism, rendered still more grievous and intolerable at Milan and Naples, during the long period of Spanish oppression, gave way before the arguments of the Milanese benefactor of mankind.

At Naples, meanwhile, Gaetano Filangieri†, like Beccaria, a man of the highest descent, undertook, by a more vast and deliberate attack, the final demolition of the oppressive privileges of that class to which he belonged.

The treatise "*Dei Delitti e delle Pene*," and the "*Scienza della Legislazione*," made the Italians aware of the want they stood in of a total reorganisation of society.

The activity of men's minds had received an impulse which no effort of absolutism could arrest. Amazed and terrified as they were by the diffusion of these new doctrines, the Italian princes could not stem the current to which their beneficial reforms had given the first start.

Pope Boniface XIV. interfered in behalf of Genovesi, who had been traduced before the Inquisition at Naples

* Cesare Beccaria, of Milan, born, A.D. 1735; died, 1793.

† Gaetano Filangieri, of Naples, A.D. 1752-1788.

under charge of heresy, and raised the interdict from his works. The court of Ferdinand IV. sheltered Filangieri from the animadversions of the Neapolitan nobility. His works, and those of Beccaria, were published at Leghorn, under sanction of Peter Leopold, bearing, however, the false date of Philadelphia; and though at Venice those writings were proscribed under capital punishment, still such measures were rather the result of inveterate habits, than of any hope that that decrepit and imbecile government entertained of resisting the new light that dawned over Italy, or of retarding its own impending fate.

Every where this love of positive and practical studies superseded the idle and emasculate literature that the Jesuits had long propagated and fostered. Every branch of knowledge was forcibly directed to one scope—the regeneration of the Italian mind.

The Italians began to be ashamed of the poetry of their Arcadian swains. The crackings of Baretti's formidable whip, "*Frusta Letteraria*," scared those trifling warblers from their academical groves*. The wanton attacks of the ex-Jesuit Bettinelli on Dante had the effect of re-awakening the enthusiasm of the Italians for the memory of their much-injured bard. Gasparo Gozzi first gathered Bettinelli's gauntlet; and, after his example, Dante found numberless propugners and disciples†.

A manly and truly Dantesque style of poetry revived in the "*Visions*" of the noble Varano, and, not long afterwards, in the verses of Cesarotti and Monti, who, whatever may be said of the pedanting presumption of the

* Giuseppe Baretti, of Turin, born, A.D. 1719; died, 1789. "*Lettere Famigliari*," Milan, 1762. "*Frusta Letteraria*," 1763. "*Italian Dictionary*," London, 1760. "*Spanish Dictionary*," 1772. Baretti was twice established in London; a friend of Dr. Johnson, and of his literary circle.

† Gasparo Gozzi, A.D. 1713-1786. "*L'Osservator Veneto*." "*Gazzetta Veneta*." "*Lettere Famigliari*." "*Sermoni*," &c.

first, and of the more than versatile character of the last, announced, by their "Ossian" and "Pelligrino Apostolico," a new era of Italian versification.

Still the poets, whose strains better harmonised with the spirit of the times, were the sterile and chastened, but severe Parini and Alfieri.

The influence of the tragedies of this last on the minds of his contemporaries was by itself equal to a complete revolution. Those verses, barren and unimaginative as they are said to be, seemed to engrave themselves in the Italian hearts, irresistibly, indelibly.

Alfieri provided his countrymen with the war-music that was to cheer and support them during the long and, as yet, unsuccessful struggle, that has hitherto cost them many tears, and is likely to cost them still more blood, but which must eventually lead them to be worthy of their name.

Thus the germs of a moral regeneration had been sown in Italy, without the immediate interference of foreign invaders. Had the mental progress, to which Vico, Beccaria, Filangieri, and Alfieri, were leading the way, been suffered to proceed unhurried and unimpeded, the transition from thought to action would have been slower, perhaps, but more deliberate and unanimous.

The royal reformers, who had acted thus far only under the influence of their arbitrary impulse, would either have been made aware of the necessity of the cooperation of their subjects, or would have succumbed in their attempt to check or force back the train of social movement.

The Italian philosophers were builders. The task assigned to them by Providence was by far the noblest. They were the real benefactors of their race; but human curiosity is only attracted where the trampling of horses and the clashing of steel bewilder the terrified imagination. The progress of mankind is only marked by works of destruction, as the history of the earth they inhabit is traced by floods and earthquakes.

Italian constructiveness was soon to give way before French destructiveness.

A nation in modern times could no longer proceed in its course, without a more or less direct influence of the ideas prevailing in other countries. Indeed, it is but fair to avow, that the results which intellectual life had attained in Italy before 1789, were partly due to the dissemination of foreign doctrines.

The splendour to which French literature had risen in the golden age of Louis XIV., in the very period when literature in Italy was at its lowest ebb, had placed that country in a state of mental dependence on its more fortunate rival, from which the efforts of the new schools of Neapolitan and Milanese philosophers could only gradually emancipate it.

The doctrines of Voltaire and Rousseau, though received with awe and mistrust, though occasionally refuted with vigour and ability, still had a dazzling effect on minds that had but lately shaken off the ignominious yoke of the Jesuits.

Before the Italians had rid themselves of this state of wardship towards France, they were involved in its ruin.

Had the French proceeded no farther than the convocation of the states-general, and the demolition of the Bastille; had the patriots of 1789, and not the regicides of 1793, marched to the conquest of Italy, there is but little doubt that their invasion would have been unanimously countenanced.

The Italian governments relied rather on the acquiescence, than the support of their subjects. They had bestowed on their people the blessings, but exempted them from the cares of their paternal government. They had provided for the common welfare, but with the total extinction of public spirit. When the hour of danger arose, they perceived that the defence of the state devolved entirely on their hands.

Their pampered, but mute and dastardly, slaves looked on their masters' and their country's forthcoming ruin, as unconcerned as if their interference had been illegal and treasonable.

As their rulers had never exacted from them any other proofs of loyalty and devotion than plaudits and blessings, so no other demonstration of fidelity accompanied them in their flight than a sterile sympathy and unavailing regrets.

The well-meaning Joseph II. and Peter Leopold had died ere the storm gathered upon them, in 1790; and their unwise successors, terrified by the first announcement of a still remote danger, had suspended the reforms which the most enlightened of their subjects already began to consider as insufficient and trifling. In proportion as they lost popularity, those governments adopted new measures, more vexatious and hostile.

The mass continued brutally silent and neutral; but, wherever there was mind, the republican innovators found open abettors and auxiliaries.

Unfortunately the French did all in their power to disgrace and contaminate the cause of liberty.

The upright and pious in Italy shuddered at the report of that long reign of madness and crime. They beheld with amazement their apostle of liberty, Alfieri, who had purchased his personal independence with the sacrifice of rank and wealth—Alfieri, profoundly grieved at seeing the name of freedom profaned by the demagogues of the *sans-culottic* school, revolted at the atrocities of what he called "a nation of half tigers, half monkeys," and obliged to fight his own way through the mob-besieged gates of their distracted metropolis.

Their alarm, however, did not bring the Italians back to their allegiance. Those who had despaired of the cause of freedom drew their cloak around them, equally refusing to be the supporters of despotism and the promoters of licentiousness.

Meanwhile the republicans drew near.

The Italian governments—with the exception of Piedmont, where the drilling and drumming Prussian system of military rule had engendered a soldierly if not a war-like spirit—unarmed and unprotected, rallied around the Austrian standard, only to fall with that power. Venice and Genoa had recourse to their pusillanimous neutrality, which hastened their ruin.

The defence was inefficient and short.

Notwithstanding the inaction and apathy of the best part of Italian patriots, who were calmly awaiting events, there were still rash and daring innovators, in sufficient number, to allow their rulers no rest.

While his unwilling soldiers were disputing the passes of the Alps with indifferent success, the King of Sardinia was harassed by insurrections in his provinces, and threatened by conspiracies in his capital. The King of the Two Sicilies, who had exhausted his finances to prepare an armament destined to join the allies in the north, beset by dangers at home, was forced to suspend his hostilities until resistance could no longer avail him.

Revolt and treason were visited with awful punishments at Turin and Naples. But the very severity of these governmental measures added fresh exasperation to the general discontent. The Italians perceived that despotism could have its reign of terror no less than Jacobinism.

Fortune, in the meantime, declared in favour of the brave. Those who had not been seduced by the specious doctrines were dazzled by the splendid success of the French. It was fated also that the conquering legions were led by two heroes, belonging by birth to the invaded country—Massena and Bonaparte.

This last, it is true, has been by the French repeatedly claimed and abjured according to the tide of popular fanaticism. The Italians suffered more than any other na-

tion from the ambition of the fatal man : they murmured, conspired, rose against him, but never refused to acknowledge the Corsican as their own.

He bore then in his pale, emaciated aspect, in his eagle eye, in his flowing hair, all the characteristic features of an Italian countenance. His juvenile enthusiasm, the vastness of his mind, were eminently the gift of the happy climate that gave him birth. The land of his fathers was also the theatre of his first exploits, the instrument of his rise. Never did Napoleon look more like an Italian than at Lodi or Arcolo.

His genius seemed to catch fire under the rays of an Italian sun. Like Antheus, he rose with a redoubled vigour whenever he touched the soil of his father-land.

Bonaparte appeared and conquered. Innumerable volunteers and deserters joined the tricolour standard. Reggio, Bologna, Bergamo, Brescia, near all Lombardy, ran to meet the invader. Every where popular insurrection favoured and determined the conquest.

The vanquished governments purchased a precarious and ignominious peace, at an exorbitant rate, in vain. Before the end of two years, the French had accomplished the deliverance of Italy.

The Italians paid dearly for their ransom. The whole wealth of the country could not satisfy the rapacity of their liberators. The noblest monuments of Italian valour and genius were taken from their cities : that nation of artists was wounded in the most sensitive part.

Yet they endured and hoped. They thought that no reward could fully atone for the blood their deliverers had shed for their cause. They knew that liberty could be purchased only by immense sacrifices ; that great calamities are inseparable from so total a subversion of the established order of things.

They suffered and believed. They enlisted in the ranks

of the French victors; they sat in the debates of their republican councils; they voted for the election of their magistrates. The days of public life had returned!

A sudden reaction was, however, at hand. Bonaparte sailed for Egypt. The tide of fortune was turned in favour of the allies. The lowest classes, who had been rather amazed than seduced by the specious arguments of Jacobinism; who had furiously, though unsuccessfully, attempted to oppose the progress of the French at Binasco and Pavia, at Verona, Lugo, and Naples—now inflamed by their priests, and headed by Austrians and Russians in the north, and by the English in the south, arose in arms for the altar and throne.

Awful calamities ensued. Deserted by the French, overcome by numbers, betrayed by a shameless breach of capitulation, the Italian republicans fell victims to an insane and cowardly vengeance. Men of the brightest talents, of the purest morals, Tenivelli, Cirillo, Mario Pagano, Caracciolo, and a hundred others, perished on the scaffold. The dungeons groaned with victims. Fugitives died of want abroad.

Presently Napoleon reappeared on the Alps. A legion of Italian exiles marched as his vanguard. Marengo was fought. Once more French liberty prevailed.

Soon the French grew weary of their liberty. They invested the Corsican hero with unlimited powers. The First Consul of the French became president of the Italian republic. The Emperor of France was crowned with the iron crown of the kingdom of Italy.

The spell of republican illusion was broken. But the no less potent charm attached to political and military activity had increased with the extinction of liberty. A large part of the country, Piedmont, Parma, Tuscany, and Rome, was made an integrant part of the French territory. Naples had been given to a soldier of fortune. Lombardy alone preserved the name, and only the name, of Italy.

Still that name, at least, was mentioned. For the first time after the fall of the Roman empire, the Italians were made aware that they had a country. An Italian standard was raised; Napoleon instituted an Italian senate, an army, a navy, an order of knighthood. Eminent men from every province, hitherto strangers to each other, met as brothers at Milan. Lombard and Piedmontese regiments rivalled the valour of their masters on the battle-field. Lahoz, Pino, Lecchi, and others, ranked among Napoleon's best generals. The leader of leaders himself, they believed, was an Italian. As long as France endured a Corsican on its throne, Italy could hardly consider itself under a foreign prince.

Meanwhile, the downfall of the ancient governments had brought about the cessation of grievous abuses. The petty divisions of the old Italian states had disappeared. Though still nominally tripartite, Italy, for all commercial and intellectual purposes, was one. The efforts of a strong and unswerving despotism brought the country under a uniform plan of administration. The cloisters had been broken open, and an end put to the influence of priestly craft. The pope himself was dragged an exile and prisoner to France. Confusion and apostasy had dispersed the ranks of his supporters.

The slow and imperfect reforms which the Italian princes had timidly commenced were carried on with all the earnestness and solicitude of a government, to whose ends all means were made subservient. It is impossible to conceive how greatly the arts of peace were promoted in those warlike times. Commerce and agriculture never presented more glorious results. The union of the country had demonstrated its inexhaustibleness.

The roads across the Alps and Apennines, the suppression of monasteries, and the code of Napoleon, were sufficient to indemnify the Italians for the severe calamities they had to endure.

But among that nation the name of republic was associated with every idea of greatness and power. Their enthusiasm for Napoleon decreased in proportion as he advanced towards the attainment of the supreme power.

He appeared in their eyes, as it has been very aptly observed, little better than one of their ancient condottieri on a gigantic scale; and, as if to render his yoke yet more insupportable, he employed foreign arms for the subjugation of their country, relied on a foreign nation for the accomplishment of his ambitious schemes, abjured and mistrusted his countrymen, and seemed to be ashamed of his Italian name.

The presumptuous and scornful manners of his lieutenant, Beauharnois, who had not even equal claims to their admiration, afforded more ample cause for universal malcontent.

The French government became the butt of the attacks of patriotic writers. Insurrections broke forth in the wildest districts of the Apennines. Even in his metropolis, Napoleon found himself beset by Italian and Corsican conspirators.

Had the Emperor peacefully endured on his throne, the day was perhaps at hand, when Italy would have risen against him, and asserted its independence.

Before that day arose, Napoleon had tempted Providence, and consummated his ruin. So rapid, so amazing was his downfall, as to bring confusion and dismay among his adversaries as well as his friends. The allies took advantage of that instant of universal perplexity to forward their claims over Italy. Deception and force, consternation and lassitude, had already prepared the Italians for submission.

That period of twenty years had been to them like a feverish dream. They awoke only to find themselves the slaves of Austria.

The republican and imperial governments have been justly considered as favourable to the progress of science and literature.

From their first invasion the French had contrived to enlist all men of eminence and ability in their cause. All the publicists who had by their writings anticipated, or hastened the revolution; the disciples of the school of Beccaria and Verri at Milan—of Genovesi and Filangieri at Naples; poets, historians, physicians, astronomers—all were called to grace Napoleon's retinue. Never had Italy been supposed to possess so many men of genius as were now seen in a crowd at Milan or Pavia.

Truly, many of them either incurred the displeasure of their imperious patron, by their independent demeanour, or retired from court in the bitterness of disappointment. Still never, or very seldom, was any distinguished personage induced to pass over to Austria. None but the lowest classes ever declared in favour of that power.

The engineer, Fontana; the greatest of Italian anatomists, Scarpa; Oriani, the astronomer; Galvani and Volta, unrivalled names in natural sciences; the last of classic artists in Italy, Canova; and all, in fine, to whom modern science is most indebted, were strongly attached to the republican name, and reluctantly submitted to Napoleon's despotism; and though some of them continued after the restoration to receive pensions from Austria, still they seemed to feel the paralysing influence of that torpid government, and ended their lives in comparative obscurity.

Still it would be impossible that the startling events of that brilliant era had not seduced or deterred literary men from their contemplative life. As soon as the hour of action had come, society was divided into injurers and sufferers. The bold ranged themselves into the lists, as actors; the timid stood appalled and silent aside, as spectators. None were free from hope or fear; hence few had courage or leisure to write.

All was involved in the general vertigo, until the rage of the elements abated. Italian literature underwent a temporary intermission; poets and scholars were transformed into warriors and statesmen.

We have seen that Italian literature had obeyed French influence, even before the revolution. But, after the invasion, mental dependence became even more fatal to Italy than political bondage.

The Italian language was corrupted in its very sources ; at Turin, Parma, and Rome, as departments of the French empire, it was officially proscribed. The Tuscans alone, in regard to the purity of their accent, were suffered to make use of their national language. Whilst in every branch of useful knowledge the Italians endeavoured to follow, or rival, their transalpine masters, polite literature was threatened with imminent ruin.

Cesarotti, Parini, and the other poets of the preceding generation, were setting in silence ; the first in his retirement at Padua, after having propitiated the favour of the Corsican conqueror by his venal muse ; the last, bearing his disenchanted hopes and vain indignation into his forgotten grave.

The general attention was then shared among three contemporaries of different manners and tastes ; characteristic geniuses destined to represent the opposite parties into which the Italians, in the alternation of so many vicissitudes, were compelled to range themselves—Monti, Foscolo, and Pindemonte.

The first had arrived, unbidden and unwelcome, from the court of Pius VI., deserting the papal standards with a most flagrant apostasy ; and had brought into the republican mart those very verses which he had hitherto prostituted to the opposite cause.

Surrounded with honours and influence ; respected, though mistrusted and closely watched, by the several governments to which, with equal eagerness, he successfully proffered his services ; well known as a formidable enemy, but a faithless friend—he had contrived to overpower all feelings of shame, and seemed to style himself openly “ the poet of the times ; the constant friend of the conqueror.”

He had weathered the most tremendous storms, with rare ability, during the republican and imperial drama; and when the curtain fell—when, after the restitution of peace, letters began to regain their ascendancy, he might be seen at Milan, in the midst of a crowd of young poets and old pedants, the sovereign arbiter of literature, still hale and vigorous, though his hazel hair was besprinkled with the frosts of age; with the animated brow, the radiant and winning smile of a courtier poet*.

The second, Ugo Foscolo, clad in the green uniform of a Cisalpine officer, with a dark, menacing countenance, disfigured by a large volume of hair and whiskers, with the marks of wild, dangerous passions in every feature,

“Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,”—

like Ajax, the hero of one of his tragedies; Foscolo, a soldier, a poet, an austere patriot, a victim of his own violence—hesitating all his lifetime between exile and the dagger of Ortis; Foscolo, driven from Venice by the Austrians; from Milan, Brescia, and Pavia, by the French; addressing the First Consul in the language of Brutus; alone refusing his homage to the throne before which monarchs bowed and trembled; applauding the emancipation of his country from the French yoke, only to behold the establishment of a more lasting and irksome despotism; and preparing himself for the miseries of solitude and poverty that awaited him in the land of exile†.

The last, a soft, colourless face, with a deep, serene eye,

* Vincenzo Monti, born at Fusignano, A.D. 1754; *Abate Monti*, 1778–1798. “Aristodemo.” “Bassvilliana.” “Musogonia.” “Feroniade.” *Cittadino Monti*, 1798–1804. “Caio Gracco,” Mascheroniana. *Cavalier Monti*, 1804–1814. “Bardo Della Selva Neva.” “Spada di Federico II.” &c., 1814–1828. “Omaggio Mistico.” “Ritorno d’Astrea.” Died, 1828.

† Ugo Foscolo, born at sea, near Zante, A.D. 1777. “Jacopo Ortis,” Milan, 1802. “Orazione a Bonaparte,” Lugano, 1829. “I Sepolcri.” “Tieste.” “Ajace.” “Ricciarda.” Tragedies, &c. Died, 1827.

a delicate frame ; downcast, pensive, and sad—Pindemonte ; seldom venturing far from his rural abode—a harmless spectator, hating no man, revered by all parties, secure in his integrity, in his unenvied obscurity*.

Such were the poets who flourished in the times of Napoleon ; but their influence was only felt among the youths of the following generation.

Bred up with classic taste ; occupied in translations of Homer ; influenced by the reigning authority of the genius of Alfieri, but early brought into the midst of the innovating activity of a revolutionary age ; obeying almost unconsciously the general current of thought, and naturally placed at the head of the intellectual movement—those three poets were destined to constitute the link between the established theories and the invading ideas—between Classicism and Romanticism.

All of them were warmly interested in the restoration of Dante—in the vindication and emancipation of the national language : all of them contributed to give a truly Italian character to the literature of their contemporaries.

Monti, the most able reviver of the Ghibeline poet, the greatest master of style, perhaps, after him, had all of Dante excepting his soul. That rich, pompous dress—that ever-rolling majesty—that dazzling vividness of colouring was found, at length, to cover only barrenness and shallowness, only ashes and smoke. It was found that his inventive powers were limited ; his images vague and undefined. A total absence of principle, an entire want of faith and conviction, soon broke the spell of that borrowed grandiloquence. The active minds, the generous, the confident, spurned the wanton seduction, and the reign of Monti was over.

Foscolo, like Alfieri, rather a great soul than a powerful

* Ippolito Pindemonte, A.D. 1763-1823 ; a native of Verona. "I Sepolcri." "Sermoni," &c.

mind, mastering men and events, mastered by his passions, in a perpetual struggle with himself, reining his imagination, and paralysing his forces, only showed that he was a genius, without fulfilling the true mission of a genius.

He dived into the most sanguine illusions of the times ; writing and fighting ; roving and raving ; loving much and hating much more ; but he displayed no taste or aptitude, or had no leisure for the pursuit of a regular course of ideas.

Satisfied with having won the favours of fame by a short courtship of four hundred lines, with having poured out his soul in the pages of his Venetian hero, the author of " *I Sepolcri*," and " *Jacopo Ortis*," sank in disappointment and inaction to die in distress and bitterness of heart. Sometimes, in his inordinate love of erudition, he would make a show of his classical lore, with almost puerile vanity ; sometimes he would toil with a deplorable perseverance at the mechanic construction of a few lines, which afterwards, in utter exhaustion, he left unachieved.

Pindemonte, the master of the gentle and delicate feelings, the high-priest of melancholy—of a sweet, all-endearing melancholy, giving heart and voice to the whole kingdom of nature, a man of innocence and forbearance, was not in unison with the unsettled period in which he was destined to live.

Fifty years earlier he might have raised and ennobled—fifty years later he might have assuaged and consoled—his countrymen ; but in that raging effervescence—in that ebbing and heaving of passions, his voice could not make itself audible, any more than a cry of distress in the roar of the ocean—any more than the strain of the lark in the din of a hurricane.

Thus, with the highest qualifications, each of the three poets of the times of Napoleon failed in gaining for himself the title of the bard of the age. The first, discredited by a cowardly connivance ; the second, exhausted in a

desperate struggle; the third, cast into the shade by a harmless but pusillanimous neutrality.

Monti wanted the dignity, Foscolo the calmness, Pindemonte the energy of a really superior mind.

By the side of the three poets must be placed the historian of the revolution—the Guicciardini of modern times—Botta*.

“Proposing to write,” he said at the beginning of the first book, “the history of events that took place in Italy in our days, I know not what the people of the present age will say of me.”

Botta showed, by these words, that he was aware of all the dangers attendant on his enterprise of writing contemporaneous history.

The judgment of his contemporaries did, in fact, bear harshly against him. His works were the object of virulent attacks; and the repose of his last years was disturbed by the animosities he had raised.

But now Botta is dead, and we, his survivors, his earliest posterity, have a right to constitute ourselves his judges, and review the sentence that party spirit has passed against him.

It is not difficult to vindicate his fame against all charges of venality. The indigence and exile that were his portion after the fall of Napoleon are sufficient evidence against such ungenerous accusations. Equally reviled by all factions, he was sold to no faction. Those who have seen him in his humble dwelling in France, who knew on what

* Carlo Botta, a Piedmontese, born, A.D. 1766; arrested for political offences, 1792; a physician in the French armies, 1794; a member of the provisional government of Piedmont, 1799; a member of the Legislative Assembly, 1800–1814; rector of the Academy of Nancy and of Rouen, 1814–1815. “*Storia d’America*,” Paris, 1809. “*Storia d’Italia*,” 1789–1814 (Paris, 1824). “*Histoire des Peuples d’Italie*,” Paris, 1825. “*Storia d’Italia*,” 1490–1789 (Paris, 1832). “*Il Camillo*,” 1815, &c. Died in Paris, 1837.

means he depended for his sustenance, must confess that, had he ever sold himself, he must have made, to say the least, a very losing bargain.

Nor is the charge of ingratitude towards the memory of Napoleon better founded.

Botta was, at different intervals, a physician in the French armies, a deputy from his native district, a president of a scientific institute in France. He never attracted the personal attention of the great conqueror except in the last years of his reign. With his great talent for judging of men, and availing himself of their abilities, Napoleon employed Botta within his natural sphere, and conferred on him no favour from which he did not expect to derive equal advantages for the state.

Botta was then bound to Napoleon's memory by no feelings that could prevent him from writing; nor could he, while writing, be hindered by any personal feelings from declaring what he deemed to be truth.

Botta was a patriotic historian. At the moment he began his narration, he had just awakened from a dear illusion, in which all the best friends of Italy had equally shared, and wished to leave in his history a warning to his countrymen against future deception.

He had finally perceived that the Austrians, though in the end successful, were not the most formidable enemies of the independence of his country; that the antipathy of all Italians, and especially the Lombards, against them, needed no further exasperation; that no time, no mildness, no soothing manners, could ever reconcile the vanquished to the victors.

Sure on that ground, he saw, on the other hand, that, notwithstanding recent disappointment, the eyes of all Utopians were still turned towards France for their rescue, and *Gallomania* was still, to many minds, synonymous with patriotism.

He saw this, and, by a heart rending picture of the

horrors he had witnessed, he desired to impress upon his contemporaries that hard, but salutary lesson, which forms almost the conclusion to all his chapters, and so often recurs in the same words: "that English and French, Austrians and Russians, were equally the sworn enemies of unfortunate Italy; that there is no deception, no treachery, no ravage, she had no reason to expect from all these powers; and that to rely upon foreign aid for her emancipation could lead to no better results than a change of masters."

A holy lesson this, and a prophetic warning!

But at the moment it was given the effervescence of men's minds was too great to allow calm judgment the exercise of its functions. The recent remembrance of the military despotism of Napoleon still dazzled the fancy with all the *prestige* of glory. The dull and deathlike yoke of the Austrians made a sad contrast to the activity and liveliness of the French dominion. The name of Italy was as yet imperfectly understood. The patriotic ranks were principally filled by malcontents from the Cisalpine assemblies, or from the French armies; Jacobins, royalists, constitutionalists—opposite elements, cast together by common reverses, and used to call themselves French—to speak and think French; raising, in the secrecy of their homes, shrines to the memory of the "man of destiny;" looking towards St. Helena as they had looked towards Elba, for a new rising of "the star," some of them refusing all belief to the tidings of the death of the "sultan of death."

To such a set of warm and heroic believers, no wonder if the history of Botta sounded like calumny and blasphemy; and no wonder, also, if, after so many experiments, the Italian patriots of 1820 and 1831, resting on the fair promises of France, and plunging still into the same illusions, had the same calamities to deplore.

It is difficult, however, to determine how far the end can justify the means; and few would take upon themselves to

affirm that, in pursuance of his own views, Botta has not, in many circumstances, palliated or exaggerated the truth, making the best of an epoch in which an impudent system of lying in all official bulletins and newspapers had involved truth in a maze of perplexity.

He has, for instance, too far and too often exalted the valour of the ever-beaten warriors of Austria. He has too generally ascribed to chance the brilliant successes of the French. He has overrated the wisdom and mildness of the old governments, and underrated the talents and uprightness of the new ones.

But, above all, the desire of giving his History the dark hues of Macchiavello and Guicciardini, as he gave his style their turn and manner, has made him extravagant in his exhibition of human simulation and perfidy. He has put before his eyes a smoked glass, and all around him looks dark and pale. Society is for him a den of wild beasts.

Botta is a virtuous writer, but no believer in virtue. He is a patriot, but he has despaired of his country. A lover of good, but a prophet of evil. He revolts his reader with a faithful exhibition and a strong execration of baseness and crime; but he disheartens him by the conviction of their constant prosperity. There may be a dolorous truth in his doctrines, but we do not see to what they can lead but misanthropy and suicide.

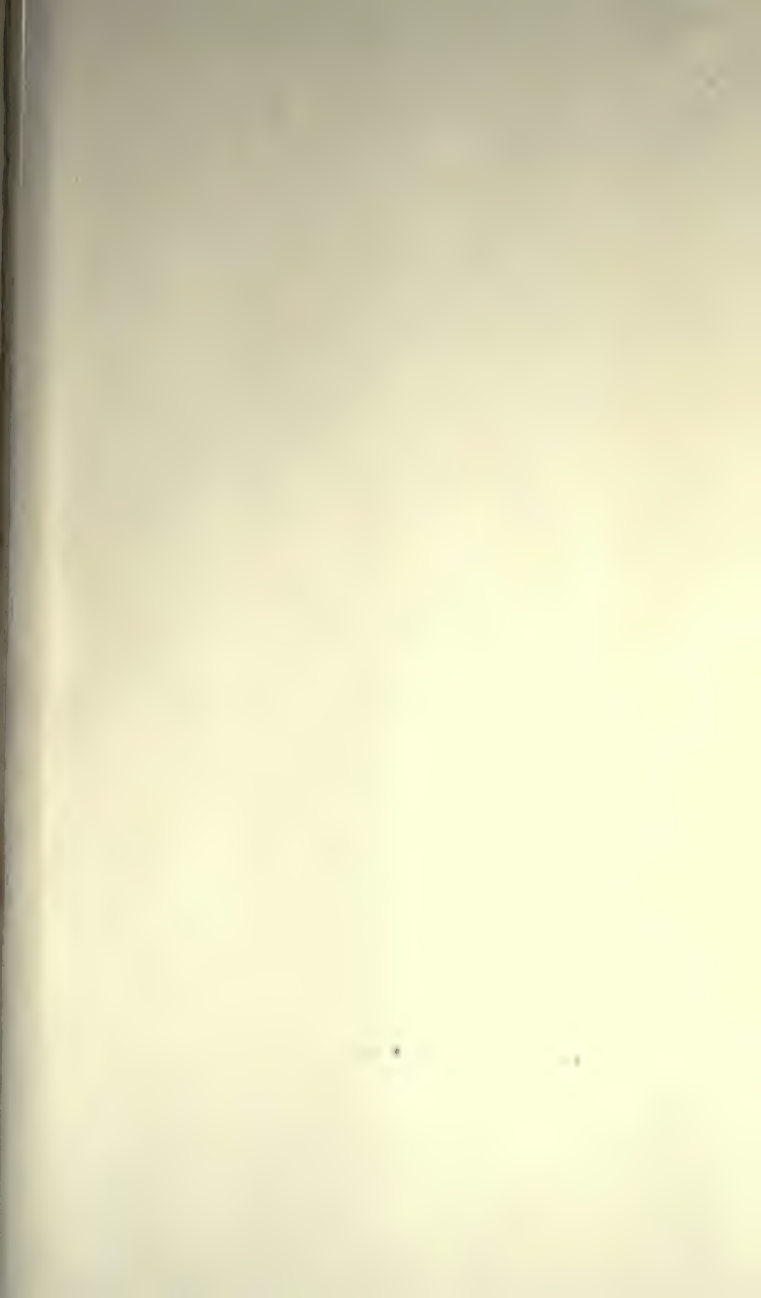
Truly this cold scepticism of despair was but too general among those who were either actors or spectators of the late European convulsions. Ashamed of their extreme credulity, they shut their hearts against all further belief. Like Brutus at Philippi, they thought that virtue was only an illusion, an empty name. Foscolo, in his "*Jacopo Ortis*," had given the model of an Italian patriot of the old school. Botta, with his sneering syllogisms, laughed hope out of countenance.

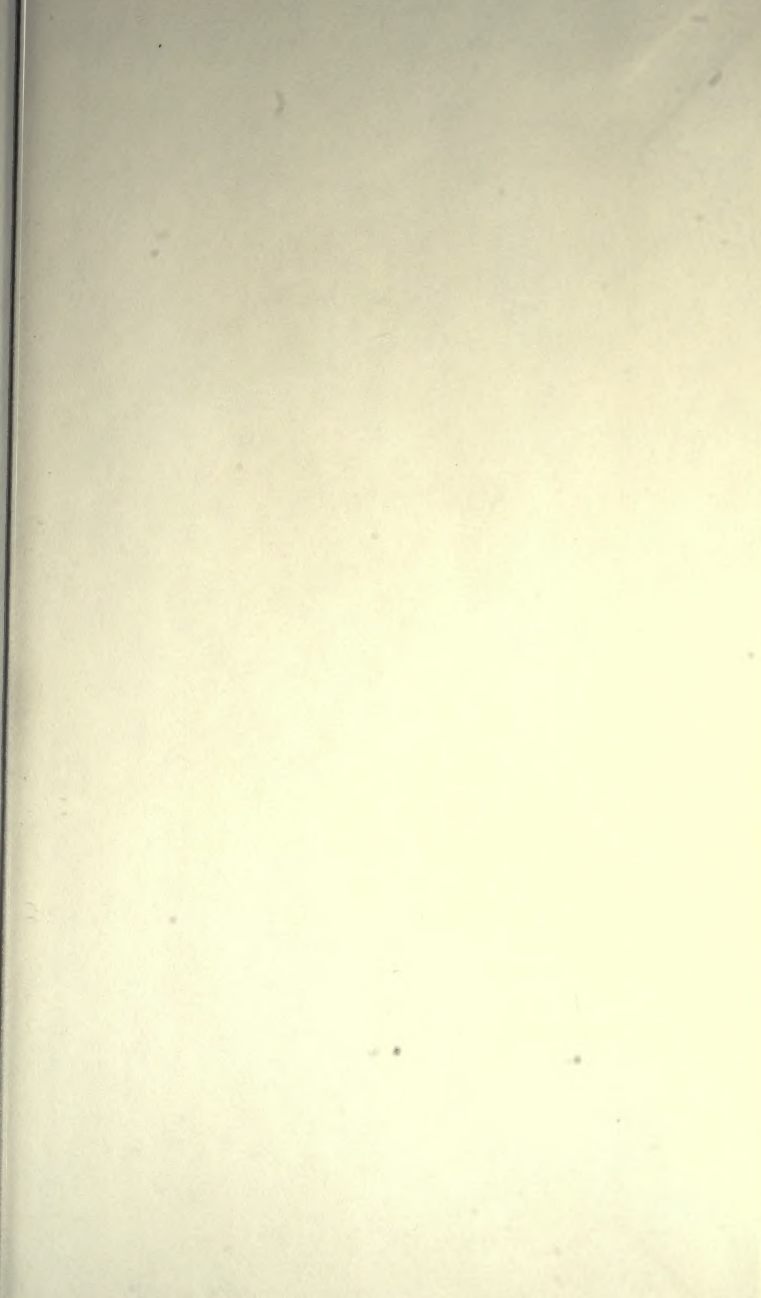
But shall there be no refuge against evil, except suicide or indifference? Shall virtue find no supporters, because

its former champions perished in fight? Shall Italy never be independent, because the patriots of 1814 were discordant and unfortunate?

No! God commands us to follow the impulse of conscience; to toil and struggle, unmindful of the results of our efforts. The ultimate success rests entirely in his hands; and he knows how to turn our very reverses to the accomplishment of his unerring judgments.

END OF VOL. I.





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